

CHAPTER 6

Political Science and the Undergraduate

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I

Reflection on the training of undergraduates is not only an obligation imposed on us by our functions as teachers, it is a salutary opportunity for us as scientists and scholars to reassess ourselves and our discipline at a time when it is directionless and in disarray as well as having lost its appeal to students. The younger student—not yet committed to any profession, still open to various temptations and blandishments, in need of inspiration, learning and guidance—provides an excellent focal point, for in thinking of him we are constrained to think about what we should contribute to the formation of a whole man and what we actually are contributing to that formation. We must try to determine where political science fits in the scheme of the sciences and what role its study plays in the economy of the soul.

This kind of return to our origins has been sadly neglected. For a long while a combination of self-satisfaction and the hopes generated by the new scientific project in politics kept political scientists from serious reflection on their pedagogical responsibilities, except to the extent they sought for recruits to the new science. Being unattractive to undergraduates became almost a hallmark of the seriousness of a political scientist—showing that he had divorced himself from vulgar common sense and youthful enthusiasm, that he had become like the physical scientist in his laboratory. Then, when real politics made insistent demands, some political scientists returned to the young, not as teachers but as followers and demagogues, and extorted promises from the other political scientists in their newly donned white smocks that what was going to emerge from the laboratories would be of benefit to the activists. All this was only response to immediate pressure, not serious re-thinking. Political science curricula are now un-

structured heaps, reflecting unarticulated tastes and compromises reached for the sake of domestic tranquility. They reflect no agreement about what political science is or what kind of training makes a political scientist.

To put it bluntly, students and citizens in general have an instinctive awareness of what politics is, but political science does not have any view of what it is, or at least not one that in any way corresponds to or refines that untutored awareness. This makes political science repulsive or at least uninspiring to students. It is no accident that the student political movements of the sixties had no roots in political science, were uninformed by real political knowledge, were in part directed against social science, and found among political scientists only a few late supporters who were afraid to miss the wave of the future. They were neither inspired by political scientists, nor restrained by them, nor educated by them. Their intellectual sources were in sociology, philosophy, and above all literature. Political scientists had not anticipated the movement and had nothing to say about it.

Now the awareness of which I speak is that politics has to do with justice and the realization of the good life. Somehow the authoritative political decisions about war and peace, who shall govern, education, etc., appear to determine our way of life. Politics is the arena where we most effectively settle our destinies, where we fulfill ourselves and the best of us win glory. As such it makes the highest demands on our bodies and our souls; it can at least make a claim to be the natural end of man. The quest for community in political practice and values in political theory which animated radical students was an expression, however distorted, of this political awareness and need. Aristotle was not enunciating a personal doctrine but merely giving voice to the citizen's perspective when he said that the *polis* is the association whose end is the highest and most comprehensive good, the one that includes all other goods and on which they depend. The citizen has perhaps been frustrated by modern civil society as a whole, but he has most certainly been frustrated by political science from which he had a right to expect instruction and clarification about the ends of politics and the means available to him for fulfilling them. He has been largely left with his inchoate sentiments, either quiescent or raging.

To survey the difficulty one need only look at contemporary

political science and compare it with the political science sketched by Aristotle. He called it, corresponding to its subject matter, the architectonic or master science, the one that ordered all the others, the queen of the sciences, the one that treated of the highest good, the enlightener of citizen and statesman. Our political science would not impress anyone with an imperial claim; it is one of the least reputable and advanced of the modern social sciences. It is the oldest of the social sciences, with a history going back to Socrates, whereas most of the others are of very recent origin, and all were founded in conformity with the project of the new natural sciences of which mathematics was the queen and back to which all the others were to be led. While the older queen was deposed, she has proved to be an intractable subject, resisting reduction to more primary sciences, her matter intransigently demanding common sense in order to come to light, qualitative distinctions in order to maintain its proportions, judgment about good and bad in order to be intelligible. Economics could, by abstraction from political reality, find quantifiable units, but the economy remains only a part of the political order, subject to and requiring the guidance of politics, the cause of great distortions if emancipated. In the first place, then, political science needs both a basis for a common good and an irreducibly political dimension of human nature, but it cannot find them any more and is at least partially committed not to finding them.

Further, political science is a halfway science in another way. It is both practical and theoretical. Political science is intended to assist the statesman and the citizen. It is also in quest of an understanding of human nature. These two functions are at a certain tension with one another. Theoretical impartiality is easily compromised by political commitment, and practical usefulness is frequently despised by the new scientists. And practice is in its turn corrupted by abstractness and doctrinarianism. Actually, however, the two sides contribute to one another—the perspective of political actions providing the subject matter and the concern, the perspective of theory providing the distance and reflectiveness which can both correct policy and give us the opportunity to escape the limits of our own time and place. But the new political science has eschewed this productive tension without fulfilling the demands of one side of it or the other. The "serious" political scientists tend to despise the practical perspective as journalistic or worse. But their science does not attain to the level of an explana-

tion of political man. A famous political scientist once asserted to me that it was wrong for the APSA to invite famous political figures to address its conventions. "They are our data," he said. "When physicists have Geiger counters giving speeches at their conventions, then I will think it right to let President Truman speak to us." I doubt whether a political science which looks at statesmen and their concerns as a biologist looks at genes through a microscope is even possible. It would certainly be irrelevant to an undergraduate student who is going to be a voter or who hopes to be a politician. One of the most salient characteristics of many political scientists is that they are not interested in politics. Aristotle considered political science to be but a refinement of such an interest; new political scientists pride themselves on a radical break with it.

There is a final reason for political science's problems with undergraduate education, and this one is only in part due to the behavioral movement. Political science is no longer able to distinguish between the important and the unimportant, the central and the peripheral. Aside from the methodological considerations which helped to blur these distinctions, the simple growth of the sub-disciplines in the last twenty years has covered over the core to such an extent that one wonders whether it is there any more. The expansion of the universities, their willingness to respond to ephemeral demands, and the encouragement of foundations brought a horde of specialists—particularly in area studies—into political science departments the studies of whose fields should have been relegated to research institutes but who as professors had to teach courses and who constituted a voting majority in matters of department policy. Now, for example, it is difficult to find courses taught in Western European politics and difficult to find teachers for them, while areas of secondary significance for the understanding of politics are overrepresented. I would venture to suggest that American politics, international relations, and political theory are what every student most needs to know about. I do not think the required instruction reflects this, to the extent that there is a required course of instruction.

What political science education ought to be can be inferred from what I am saying it is not. It should concern itself with the great political issues—freedom, equality, virtue, religion, family and patriotism. It should provide an experience of political action and principle as well as providing a model of a reasonable approach to these issues. It

It should appeal to the student's heart while calling forth his reason. It should at least make a case for the integrity of the political phenomenon. It should concentrate on method only to the extent that method contributes to the elaboration of the questions of primary concern. It should show the various possible regimes and the arguments for and against them—particularly in the intention of avoiding the cloying cycle of conformism encouraged by contentless, unprogrammatic rebellion.

II

It is obvious that the incoherence of undergraduate education is a result of behavioralism, its attack on traditional political science, and the various responses to behavioralism. And the resolution of the problem would require a fundamental transformation of the profession's current self-understanding, for the undergraduate training will inevitably reflect the most respectable views held at the highest level of the discipline; everyone looks to the top, and in the major universities the teachers are the same as the scholars. There is not likely to be both a political education and a political science education while the demands of the two are so disparate as they now are. Thus, although what I suggest is simple, in the current situation it is utopian. However, a few further remarks are appropriate. They may be of use to individuals or small groups of teachers who are interested in politics and suggest a strategy for their educational endeavors.

In the first place, there is no doubt as to what is attracting the students at all levels: political theory. In the major universities where theory was not abandoned, the theory offerings are the most popular and graduate applicants list their intended specialization as theory more than any other. In the others there is a persistent clamor for the hiring of theorists. There are a lot of bad reasons for this renaissance of theory. On the surface, it seems to be the easiest thing to study and to provide the maximum opportunity for self-indulgence, gab, and indignation. In some quarters theory has meant little more than a cynical and self-serving outlet for anti-establishment sentiments and has become a grab-bag for every trendy movement of letting go and irrationalism. The taste for political philosophy can have its source in this generation's peculiar combination of intellectual laziness and desire for authority. But this taste gives evidence of a healthy instinct which

it trained, can bear serious fruit. That instinct is connected with the desire for living a good life, the further desire for enlightenment about what a good life might be, a longing for alternatives to what is available, the sense that the excitement and morality of life are to be found in politics. Underlying the behavioral movement in the U.S. was the conviction that all questions of principle had been solved by the advent of the New Deal and its ultimate universal acceptance and that what remained were questions of appropriate means. The current generation has taken cognizance of the shattering of that conviction, the end of the end of ideology. The study of the great texts in political philosophy attracts and sublimates this primary instinct, and by way of them the student can be led toward the careful study of concrete political reality. It is from the discussion of the good life and the just regime—and the demonstration that the books of tradition are the basis of this discussion—that one must begin with this rootless and largely unpolitical generation.

At this point I should pause to make two comments on the character of undergraduate students today, apart from the orientation toward jobs of which they are too frequently accused. (1) They do not have that everyday interest in politics as it is practiced which an older generation had. Who's in? Who's out? is not the substance of their daily consciousness and conversation. They do not follow events and personalities, either domestic or foreign. They are very private, and political events impinge on them only in fits and starts, usually in an ideological way and without detailed knowledge. Thus they do not have the stuff out of which political reflection is made. (2) This is not a reading generation. They do not enjoy reading. They read because they have to for classes or for information. There are almost no fundamental books which form their souls, which provide a common core of learning or a viewpoint. There is nothing like what the Bible, or Shakespeare, or Locke or Marx or Freud meant to earlier generations.

Both of these factors provide an obstacle to political science training. Students must first become involved in books. The books must be presented to them by teachers who care about them, know them, believe that they contain alternatives which might be chosen by their students, and can communicate some enthusiasm for them. A good example of a book well suited for this task is Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. At first sight it appears a bore to the students—long, out-

dated, and descriptive of what they think they already know. But when they become aware, for example, that Tocqueville in describing the democratic mind describes their mind and that that mind is gravely limited in its capacity for the sciences and the arts, they begin to take notice. Tocqueville argues that contained in the very principle of democracy is a tendency to intellectual mediocrity and conformism. This is a troubling assertion, one which the student is likely to discover for his own protection and because he has almost no experience of intellectual greatness. Coordinate with the assertion about the intellectual mediocrity of democratic man is the assertion that aristocrats are likely to be superior in this respect. Now aristocracy is something about which the students know nothing except for certain tales at which they simply identify with oligarchy. They are forced to look to another regime, one which denies the fundamental principle of justice—equality—which all accept and to which they are devoted. They find there are arguments on both sides of the issue, and they take democracy more seriously in calling it into question. They start looking to the practice of democracy, to historical examples of other kinds of regime and above all to the best arguments for each—none of which is simply contained in Tocqueville but to which he points. They are driven out of the narrow confines of the impoverished contemporary alternatives, but they also look at the present more closely. Is this a tyranny of the majority? What can a "power elite" be in a democracy? And Tocqueville also warns that egalitarianism can lead as well to despotism as to freedom. The study of modern tyrannies takes on a new meaning in this light. Tocqueville both teaches about the broadest themes of politics—and does so with a precision based upon experience and observation—and is also himself a model of a political scientist.

In the context of such studies, which would broaden out to the entire history of political philosophy, a student would surely want to know about voting studies; but they would be subordinate to considerations of the issues in elections, and they would surely be less important than the study of the *Federalist*. Statesmanship will be a more fundamental study than statistics. The students must get involved with great political figures, try to determine what constitutes their greatness, whether they can really influence affairs, what the relation of their prudence is to morality and justice.

Once enthused and politicized they must study history and

detailed analyses of other regimes that have accomplished great things, some past, others contemporary—the peculiar genius of British parliamentary government and its imperial achievements, that of the Roman republic, etc. Particularly useful is Soviet politics because there Americans, who can hardly really imagine another way of life as essentially different, can immerse themselves in the horrors of a modern tyranny. What is needed is not scientifically neutral studies of development or of managerial elites, but description and analysis of how this regime affects the lives of its subjects, what its goals were, how its rulers found a way to govern so securely. I do not mean that this study is unscientific, partisan, or undertaken with a propagandistic intention. It should be a dispassionate observation, but one that stays close to the questions that any thoughtful man would ask in deciding whether he wants to live in a regime. The student should be open enough to recognize that current American standards are not the only grounds of judgment, but no one's sensibilities should be so dulled by false science as not to recognize murderous despotism. A decent political science must know what everyone knows, that Watergate is bad, and its horizon must also be broad enough to make it impossible to mention it in the same breath with—not to speak of assimilating it to—the Gulag Archipelago. It is here that the fact-value debate becomes frivolous. Regimes such as that of Stalin or Caligula cannot be seen for what they are if one has been forbidden to think of them as bad. It is too simple-minded to say that we must study facts, then teach values. The facts contain the values; the separation destroys both. The study of these foreign regimes should not lead to self-congratulation and is not intended to contribute to any political movement. Its purpose is to understand the nature of political things. When the name of Hitler can be invoked to qualify Richard Daley, political science has failed in its most elemental responsibility. It is our duty to teach about such things. A generation of graduates has been produced from our universities who do not have the slightest idea what Fascism was. Neither the important facts nor the principles of judgment have been learned.

Along with political theory, the sub-discipline which has attracted and stimulated healthy political interest is international relations. Because war and peace are of such immediate and intense concern, even to political scientists, politics among nations has defied reduction. Most of its practitioners talk about real situations and not abstract models. The enormous stakes involved in political life are most clearly felt

here, particularly so today when the confrontations involve differences of fundamental principle as well as oppositions of will. Therefore a truly political judgment is maintained so long as the issues are matters of life and death. Policy orientation helps keep the focus which we are too likely to lose. It risks degenerating into journalism or preoccupation with daily affairs; it can also easily involve the temptations of being too immediately useful to power, actual or anticipated. But one can learn a lot even from those who are so involved. And if the temptations are properly controlled, the international stage is one on which the broadest spectrum of political motives can be played. All the aspects of the statesman's art are revealed there. The relation between the predictable and the unpredictable, nature and chance, become serious questions and can be concretely posed. The relation between justice and survival, principle and expediency, come best to light. The necessity and the difficulty of judging between conflicting claims become manifest. Most of all, the harsh side of life and the real problem of combining humaneness with success can be shown to young people without experience of necessity and imbued with great hopes. Living through the problems of foreign affairs is a good education in the nobility and baseness of political life and helps the student to liberate himself from the doctrinairisms of principle and method. At best it can lead him to contemplate the alternatives contained in the somber gentleness of Thucydides, the hopeful brutality of Machiavelli, and the strict moralism of Kant.

I am not arguing that a similar movement from the practice of politics to the primary theoretical issues could not be made on the basis of American politics. But given the current state of the discipline it is much harder to do so. Aron and Kissinger are closer to politics and to philosophy than are Dahl and Easton.

III

A proper training in political science must not only address itself to the student conceived universally but also to the contemporary American student, by which I mean it must correct the characteristic intellectual defects of our regime. Every regime tends to develop certain potentials at the expense of others, and a good education attempts to counterpoise this tendency for the sake of the intellectual freedom

of the individual and in the hope of mitigating the excesses of the regime. Here again Tocqueville is a good guide. The central weaknesses of egalitarian Americans to which he points and which political science training could help to rectify are the following: (1) a privacy which focuses on petty concerns such that the individual finally cannot lift himself to great issues; (2) a lack of grand ambition; (3) a lack of respect for tradition which ultimately impoverishes their understandings due to a lack of awareness of alternatives; (4) an addiction to abstract ideas; and (5) a readiness to accept deterministic explanations of things, resulting from a sense of the individual's weakness and tending to re-enforce that sense of weakness. All of these inclinations have become more pronounced since Tocqueville's time, and social science is both an expression of them and a further cause of them. With respect to weaknesses (1) and (2) above, social science has concentrated on unpolitical and ignoble motives for everything and particularly political action. With respect to (3), social science method both implicitly and explicitly denies the truth value of older books, and its peculiar brand of empiricism has confined it to recent, and particularly American, experience. With respect to (4) and (5), social science wishes to establish general laws like those of the natural sciences, ignoring the particularity of which politics is largely constituted, and those laws would leave no room for the rational choice of citizen or statesman.

The political science for which I argue and which is really at hand would act as an antidote to these moral and intellectual vices. (1) It begins by taking the political on its own terms and giving it and the motives connected with it a substantial and irreducible existence. (2) It provides a ground and a goal for the peculiarly political desire to be first, to be honored and win glory. It also provides examples and objects of admiration. (3) It makes it possible to see the wisdom in old books and the questions they raised. Our horizons are broadened by the presence of real alternatives to them. Instead of our scrutinizing everything else, we are scrutinized by the great thinkers of the past. (4) Although looking for general rules, it contains no doctrinaire assurance that they are to be found, and is open to the possibility of choice and accident. Moreover it pays particular attention to the concrete and the heterogeneous. (5) It stays on the level of the phenomena and does not explain away the manifest examples of political choice, undetermined by circumstance, affecting the most fundamental political

things. It is, thus, an education in freedom and human dignity without intending to be so.

In my experience the student caught up by the newly discovered possibility of rational reflection on justice and happiness also rediscovers the lost idea of the university—the university, today so much maligned and so uninspiring. He begins to read history for examples. He finds that the greatest literature has a political intention and gives the perfect representation of the essential political-moral problems and the heroes who grapple with them. He begins to see the importance of rhetoric for the persuasion of men. He finds he must look at science, both to evaluate its proper role in society and to find what it teaches about nature in general and hence about human nature. He finds the lost key to the unity of the sciences and thereby to a liberal education. Nothing fancy or particularly new is needed—just teachers, students, books, and a calm setting in which rational discourse is respected. By contemplating politics and its limits we face again the questions without which no life is human: freedom, virtue, god, love, and death.

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The Failure of the University

If Pascal had envisaged only some great profit, or if he had even been moved by the desire for glory alone, I cannot believe that he would have been able to marshal, as he did, all the powers of his intelligence in order better to discover the most hidden secrets of the Creator. When I see him tear his soul, as it were, from the midst of life's cares in order to attach it exclusively to this study and, prematurely breaking the bonds which keep it in the body, die of old age before forty, I am struck dumb, and I understand that it is no ordinary cause which can produce such extraordinary efforts.

The future will prove if these passions, so rare and so fecund, are born and develop so easily in the midst of democratic societies as in the bosom of aristocracies. I, for my part, avow that I find it hard to believe.

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II, i, 10.

TOCQUEVILLE, democracy's great friend and admirer, reminds us in this passage of the Platonic tripartite division of the soul—desire, spiritedness, and reason. According to that understanding of human psychology, each of these parts provides its specific motivation to action and has its own proper end. Desire seeks preservation and comfort; spiritedness, honor, particularly in politics; and reason, knowledge for its own sake, or the contemplation of being. The educated man is the one in whom each of these three elements has developed properly and fully and in whom they are most harmoniously balanced, particularly with respect to their self-evident order of rank. Now in Tocqueville's analysis, as in Plato's, different regimes tend to encourage the flourishing of one part of the soul at the expense of the others. They do so by giving power to men whose dominant motive derives from one of those parts and who by their authoritative position determine public education and the respectable objects of aspiration. The character of public life thus established reinforces, in turn, the tendencies of the citizens on whom the regime is based. A world is constituted with horizons that exclude or distort the other alternatives in such a way that they no longer come to sight as real alternatives. Higher education, to the extent that its intention is to cultivate man simply and not to make the man suitable to this time or place, must counterpoise the prevailing intellectual vice of the regime and preserve what it tends to neglect.

Democracy, or the egalitarian regime, must, according to Tocqueville, perform have utility as its primary motive: it is founded on the rule of all, and the vital desires and the fear of death are shared by all—as opposed to the desires for glory and pure knowledge which are rare. This devotion to utility is particularly true of modern democracies, the theory of which was precisely to encourage the self-regarding passions as a sure means to political consensus. Disinterested love of the

truth is particularly threatened in democracy. The motives of honor and glory which usually characterize aristocracy are not in themselves any more akin to the love of truth than is utility, but they free men from the concern for preservation and hence from the necessary attachment to a mercenary use of the mind. Aristocrats are more inclined to admire—perhaps in a frivolous way, but one which can be used to the profit of the theoretical—beautiful and useless things. A Pascal is, therefore, more a product of such a society and more likely to find a home within it. Thus, in addition to the other reasons adduced, the intellectual life in a democracy is profoundly influenced by the absence of a truly leisured class which would patronize and protect it from the demands of the market.

In modern democracies the universities have taken the place of such a class and attempted to provide a basis for the cultivation of the theoretical life which finds only thin soil elsewhere in the society. Their success would have enabled democracy to combine the advantages of equal justice with the advantages of the peaks of speculation. For the sake of the regime, it had to resist the regime's tendency to use everything for its immediate ends. And the regime has powerful weapons in money, public opinion and, above all, the appearance of moral principle.

In the last years we have witnessed the failure of the university. It has become incorporated into the system of ideas and goals of the society around it. The multiplicity, with its dedication to the useful as defined by society's demands, has joined hands with what appeared to be its enemy, the passion for commitment and sweeping social change which was the child of the late sixties. Now quietly they work together, not because the flood tide has receded, but because it has swept away what obstructed it. The university, to the extent it represented the theoretical life, is more a memory than a reality.

Very simply put, young Americans no longer like to read, and they do not do so. There are no fundamental books which form them, through which they see the world and educate their vision. To the extent they use books, it is because school requires them to do so, or it is for the sake of information. Books are not a source of pleasure, nor would many students imagine that old books could contain the answers to the problems that most concern them. The university does not represent a community the bonds of which are constituted by a shared literary heritage, and friendships are not formed by the common study of the important issues.

Professors Werner J. Dannhauser and L. Pearce Williams at Cornell University posed this question to that institution's president:

If we prove to you that an Arts and Sciences student can now receive a B.A. degree at Cornell, and thus be presumed to have acquired a liberal education, without having been required to read a line of Plato, the Bible, Shakespeare, Marx or Einstein, would you consider this to be evidence that there is a crisis in education at Cornell?

An answer was never received. It is not known whether this president, or other university presidents, would regard this situation as an educational problem. But that such university careers are possible, and even common, is a fact. No longer does the university have a content or a focus. It has accommodated itself to all demands and tastes for too long. This is the legacy of a decade of academic upheaval. What promised to be a great new openness, a liberation from artificial constraints, has resulted in emptiness.

To say the same thing in a different way, the window which opened out onto Europe has been closed. American intellectual life was always in tutelage to that of Europe. There was not much here to inspire the best minds. To the extent that we

had spiritual substance, it was derivative from the great tradition which had its origins in Europe and which was still in some measure alive there. The longing to experience the heights and depths of the soul always led toward Europe—its art, its music, its literature, its science, and its philosophy. It was a priceless advantage to have in our midst institutions which could provide us access to a beauty and a freedom of the mind which our immediate surroundings did not inspire. One of America's greatest virtues was its openness to the cultivation of disciplines which were in some measure alien to its way of life and which could help to enrich or correct it. In this way we could hope to have the best of both worlds.

But isolationism has always been one of our instincts. Going a-whoring after foreign gods was not a thing to be easily tolerated when America had its problems to be looked after. Moreover, there seemed to be a whiff of disloyalty to egalitarian principles about the man whose tastes were so different from those of the ruling majority. The schools and universities, however, more or less successfully resisted the pressure to conform, because almost their entire curriculum consisted of European things and there would have been little left to their domain if they assimilated to the public taste, and because the teachers and professors had a profound inner conviction of the importance of what they taught. Now neither of these motives for resistance has anything like the same force it once exerted.

Philosophy and liberal studies, in general, require the most careful attention to what are frequently called the great books. This is because they are expressions of teachers such as we are not likely to encounter in person, because in them we find the arguments for what we take for granted without reflection, and because they are the sources for forgotten alternatives. They make it possible for us to carry on our discussion on a high level. Thus, liberal education consists largely in the painstaking study of these books. This study requires long and arduous training, for these books are not immediately accessible to us. Without such a training, an impoverishment of our intellectual discourse necessarily results. One need only look at academic philosophy and the social sciences to see how irrelevant the tradition has become to them. They suppose they have found new methods in the light of which the older teachings appear primitive.

Formerly certain fundamental books—most notably, but not only, the Bible—provided a spiritual common ground for society at large. The universities were dedicated to profounder reflection on that spiritual common ground. That profounder reflection, while separating the universities from the society, also linked them to it. Most recently the Bible, Shakespeare, and the Declaration of Independence (and, along with it, the *Federalist*) have disappeared from public life, and a parallel development has taken place within the university. The university, if it is to play a public role, can no longer do so as the guardian and sublimator of the common concerns or as the thoughtful conscience of public practice. Its link to society appears to consist only in serving its wishes.

This loss of the tradition was explained by Tocqueville as a result of what he called the philosophic method of the Americans. Such a method consists primarily in the rejection of all authority. Every man's reason is taken to be sufficient to determine all questions. Whatever the advantages of this method—and they are many—it is fatal to tradition. As Tocqueville put it, tradition is nothing more than information for the democratic man. It is not of the essence of the classic tradition to be authoritative, but a certain authoritative status guarantees its perpetuation with men who do not see its rational merits and in times when it is untimely. Scholastics took

Aristotle too much as writ rather than as question or problem, but he was read and studied. Our age, in agreement with Aristotle that reason is the ultimate test, no longer reads Aristotle because we do not see his reasons. Hardly any thought of the past has any continuing public significance in our country, so that if the universities were to act as the preservers of the tradition, they would have to resist the tide, insist on studies which go against the grain, appear to be troglodytic and irrelevant. This they no longer have the will to do.

Young Americans surely still want to visit Europe, but the desire is no longer powerful, nor is its object the discovery of unknown worlds, the initiation into the mysteries. Going to Europe, just as going to college, is not anticipated as a transforming experience, an education, a new casting of heart and mind. The end of our inner subservience to Europe is, undoubtedly, partly just the belated coming to awareness that Europe is no longer what it was either politically or intellectually, that its present cannot make particular claims to be anything different or admirable beyond what is available here. Locke, in describing the precivilized condition of man, compares it to America prior to European settlement. "Thus in the beginning all the world was America." And that is also the case in the end. What Europe offers is only reminiscences of another world. Our situation is not unlike Madame Bovary's when, wide eyed and full of foolish awe, she was invited to a ball at the castle of decayed, postrevolutionary aristocrats.

[At the dinner, at the head of the table, alone among all of these women, bent over his full plate with his napkin knotted around his neck like a child, an old man ate, letting drops of gravy trickle from his mouth. He had bloodshot eyes and wore a little pigtail fastened with a black ribbon. It was the Marquis' father-in-law, the old Duc de Laverdière, the former favorite of the Comte d'Artois at the time of the hunts at the Vaudreuil home of the Marquis de Conflans, and who had been, it was said, the lover of Queen Marie-Antoinette between M. de Coigny and M. de Lauzun. He had led a wild life of debauch, full of duels, wagers, abducted women, had devoured his fortune and terrified his whole family. A domestic, behind his chair, speaking loudly into his ear, named the dishes for him to which he pointed while stuttering. And constantly Emma's eyes, of their own accord, returned to this old man with drooping lips as to something extraordinary and august. He had lived at court and slept in the bed of queens.]

Flaubert by means of this old man gives us a double perspective on the *ancien régime*—its present reality and what it can mean to someone with a bit of imagination. The former perspective does not exhaust the significance of the object. We could perhaps do with a bit of Emma's imagination in our view of Europe.

It is, however, not only the factual state of Europe which is the cause of our disenchantment with its books. There is also much positive doctrinairism behind it. The new egalitarianism, the defection of the intellectuals to populism or know-nothingism, found itself in harmony with the multiversity. Both believe that each student should express his unique self and find his own interests. All disciplines are equal as are all ways of life. "Doing one's own thing" is today still the motto, with the proviso that one must reluctantly also learn a trade in order to make a living (now that students have been reminded that survival is an imperative for them, too). So far as the "liberal" side of the university is concerned, it is still anything goes, without anyone's having much of an idea about what one might do. There is much lamentation about the prevailing conservatism and the abandonment of the innovative programs of the late sixties. But those programs never had any content. They were just structures for the expression of freedom or intense efforts to provide a ground for relaxation. They enjoyed a momentary vogue, for few intelligent students could

resist the promises of liberation from meaningless and irrelevant requirements and the opportunity to relate knowledge to life. Aside from the programs which were intended to answer specific political demands, however, the rest was a wasteland. Disappointment and boredom were the predictable consequences of the wave of university reforms which swept the nation, for they were demagogic and full of empty rhetoric. The rhetoric is still around, and disappointment has not led to return, but to apathy. Until the middle fifties, there was, in a conventional and perhaps formulaic way, agreement about the disciplines that constituted the core of the university. The immense growth of the university which then occurred effaced its visage. The addition of new disciplines and within the old disciplines the addition of new subdisciplines destroyed all agreement about the common end. Also, what it meant to be a professor altered radically. But this was not at the time perceived as a problem because growth offered something for everyone, and there was no thought about what would happen if that growth were to cease. The academic disorders of the sixties evoked reforms intended to conciliate student wishes rather than to serve their needs. And it also became evident that many professors had come to doubt the value of what they taught. These developments led to a further erosion of agreement about the university's vocation.

Now, with money in short supply, there is retrenchment without an "order of priorities" or any view of what should be cut out—just drift and random choice as circumstance dictates. Above all, there are the doldrums. Students are nostalgic for the excitement of the late sixties when something was really going on. The only thing they can find to look up to is the memory of the most anti-intellectual moment in the history of universities, one at which, however, there was a great deal of publicity and the universities were in the vanguard of popular culture. It is true that quiet now prevails and that students are studying again. But it is not the liberal studies that they are studying. We have nothing to offer them on that score. In order to do so, we would have to agree on the most important questions for a human life and the ways to ask them.

But it is in the nature of man to desire clarity about the highest ends, no matter how great the effort to obscure the fact that there are such ends, that they are problems, and that there is a way to study them. In my teaching I have found that the segment of Tocqueville devoted to the intellectual life of the Americans, from which my beginning quote on Pascal is drawn, is particularly moving for students—if their attention is forcibly drawn to it. At first they pass over it lightly, for Tocqueville seems to be describing a primitive America which is strictly a thing of the past. The effect of these passages is not unlike that of Swift's account of his first encounter with the Yahoos. He gives a description of them akin to a scientist's observation of a nasty creature he is the first to discover. Then, suddenly it dawns on us that the nasty creature is us as we look to an outsider. Once Tocqueville's account has pierced the deceptive veneer of contemporary culture, the student has a painful yet exhilarating moment of self-awareness. No one wishes to be unaware of the good things one could possibly enjoy. Although Tocqueville engenders a certain self-contempt, he also opens a prospect of self-improvement. The student realizes that Tocqueville's account is not a window but a mirror and that all the tendencies Tocqueville describes have been exacerbated in recent years. Tradition has decayed; the enslavement to public opinion has increased; forms have disappeared; literature has difficulty finding elevating subject matters in our lives and a discriminating audience; there is a literary mercantilism; our penchant for general ideas has in-

creased because our experience and study do not provide us with a rich concrete consciousness; our social sciences tend ever more to see deterministic explanations of human action, for we have little faith in the power of individual freedom in a mass egalitarian society; there is little or no inspiring political rhetoric, so we must be led by force or interest. And, above all, philosophy is not only not practiced, its very possibility is denied. It just has no place in our life, in the way, for example, chemistry has. Because we no longer have the European university as the standard against which to judge ourselves, we can delude ourselves about our condition, and we give way more and more to our fundamental inclinations.

Reading Tocqueville serves not only the function of self-awareness, but also that of making students realize that an old book can be of use, thereby giving them the habit of reading. Moreover, they see in Tocqueville an example of a kind of man they do not know, and some are charmed by his grace, his delicacy, and his love of justice. He not only poses the problem of our intellectual life, he himself as a model is part of a solution. They are intrigued by trying to figure out how he attained a standpoint from which he could see us so clearly, and they are aware that they must do something similar. The problem of liberal education is far from being an insuperable one. It is just that universities are not inclined to do anything about it. One can perhaps see this best when one reads that Tocqueville believed that the most efficacious way to compensate for the intellectual failings of democratic man was to study the Greek and Roman authors. Where are they now?

Up to now I have been discussing what has not been going on in universities. Now I must turn to what has been going on. It can all perhaps be summed up in an anecdote. Recently I visited a highly respected liberal arts college in New England. In order to get to my room at the faculty club I had to pass through a conference chamber in which the president, deans, and department chairmen were meeting. I hurried by, but could not help hearing one sentence uttered by the president: "History, on the other hand, might appear to be male chauvinist." These men—or persons—were doing what most university administrators are doing. They were engaged in rectifying unequal treatment, real or alleged, of equal persons—an endeavor which has exhausted the moral and intellectual energies of the university. Although the university may have nothing to teach, it is going to be taught by faculties recruited equally to all students equally admitted. The universities are quiet. The frenzy which upset us all so much has passed. But it was not a passing fad as was swallowing goldfish or streaking. The old world was overthrown by it, and the essential thrust of the movement has become incorporated into the life-giving principles of the university. What we are witnessing is the routinization or bureaucratization of the radical egalitarianism which was the essence of the student demands of the sixties. Our current calm is at least in part due to the fact that the former dissidents now really constitute the establishment.

The egalitarian effervescence of which I am speaking was, whatever the particular causes espoused, the only motive and the only goal of what took place in the last years. It had, in part, the intention of extending prevailing principles of egalitarian justice to areas where their application had been hindered, particularly in relation to blacks and women. This was perfectly in keeping with both the spirit of the regime and what is proper to the university. But there was also a new and powerful element of thought which insisted on movement from equality of opportunity to factual equality—either by way of denying that there are any relevant in-

equalities or by way of using government, the university, or genetics to overcome them. Connected with this new radical egalitarianism in the university were the abandonment of requirements, the demand for student participation in all functions of the university, the evaluation of professors by students, sex-counseling, the renouncing of standards because they encourage discrimination and unhealthy competition, a continuing inflation of grades, concentration on teaching rather than scholarship, open admissions, the introduction of new programs to fit every wish, and quotas in the admission of students and the hiring of faculty. It is questionable whether a university can pursue its proper end if it must be engaged in the fight against social inequality. But much more was being demanded of it. There was, and is, an opinion abroad that natural inequalities are as offensive as social or conventional ones, and that it is the business of the university to correct the former as well as the latter. Thus the university must declare a war on nature as well as society in the name of equality.

The intellectual effects of this determination on the part of universities are overwhelming. In the first place, equality has to become a kind of religion, doubts about which in thought, not to speak of deeds, cause pangs of conscience. It becomes impossible to reflect on the possibility that there might be a hierarchy of human types and pursuits and that it is part of the university's task and a duty of justice to encourage and cultivate some of these types and pursuits more than others. Any research, however dispassionate, which might tend to reveal differences among nations, races, or sexes which are counter to the prevailing dogma is risky indeed to the scholar. One must be circumspect in order not to appear to dissent on these great issues. Thus a whole range of thought about the alternatives for man has vanished. Timidity about fundamental issues is the order of the day.

One can see where the power lies by the things of which men most fear being accused. The charges that carry weight with the tribunal of university public opinion today are racism, sexism, and elitism, taking the place of older charges like atheism or Communism. That these are, in varying degrees, nasty dispositions cannot be doubted. But they are difficult to define. And it is as difficult to prove that a man possesses them as it is to prove that a man does not believe in God. Almost no one these days would admit to any one of them. But the air is rife with accusations. Most want to be considered in the vanguard of the fight against racism, sexism, and elitism; all wish to avoid being suspected of favoring them. Therefore, there is a fertile field for the flourishing of *tartuferie* and McCarthyism of the left. Racial, feminist, and egalitarian extremists can claim to represent the orthodoxy and promote unreasonable policies.

Take the case of women's liberation, for example. How many professors would dare to make serious investigations concerning psychic differentiations between men and women or to suggest different ways of life and education as appropriate to them? All to the contrary, there is a witch-hunt going on to root out sexism in science, philosophy, and the literary tradition. Since it is now accepted that male chauvinism dominated most of the past, it is impossible to take, for example, Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* as anything better than a particularly prejudiced perspective on men and women and their relations. It must either be expunged, held up to ridicule, or treated as a historical curiosity. Since almost none of the classic works of any kind can be taken to support the women's liberation movement, we have one more reason for abandoning the study of the tradition, for we are now on a higher moral and intellectual plateau. The new principles do not find support

to the old literature so it cannot be a source of inspiration. And, for the moment, the movement has not generated a literature of a comparable quality. In the name of truths one must, temporarily at least, accept thinner souls. And the university ponds with unceasing propaganda in order to do away with prejudices. Our visions, in universities of all places, are purposely narrowed in order to avoid possibilities unpalatable to a party. A similar story can be told about the intellectual acts of the war against racism and elitism. It is hardly an atmosphere which promotes serious discussion or contemplation of the only available examples of greatness which we possess. Our heritage is made both dangerous and contemptible. There is an utter disproportion between our intellectual substance and the political and moral reality which engages the students.

With these forces at work, university administrators, partly prodded by HEW, spend their time responding to them. There is no academic reason for what they propose, although feeble justifications are attempted. In reality the concentration is not on the quality of the professor or the student, but on the category he comes from. It follows that the immanent demands of the subject matter must be sacrificed to what this kind of teacher can teach and this kind of learner can learn. Affirmative action is but one example among many of what has absorbed university life. University administrations are not ashamed to announce that almost all of their appointments will be made from minorities or women. Without discussing what such policies do to real equality of opportunity and fairness, their effect on the intellectual standards of the disciplines is evident. And worst of all, such policies engender a hypocrisy which is rotting the moral core of the university, the place where truth is supposed to be the first of all concerns. We are treated to assertions that appointments are made on merit, when everyone knows that a member of a minority or a woman is a hot academic commodity and that quality is of secondary importance. Departments just must have them—to show them off to HEW, to radical constituencies, to the press. We are told that open admissions have not damaged academic standards, without being provided with the criteria for such judgments and when there are good reasons to think the opposite is the case. We are assured that the black and women's studies programs are great successes, whereas one finds that they are actually neither clear about what they are doing nor satisfying the very constituencies for which they were established. We are told that reverse discrimination is not practiced (for example, whites excluded from university-owned housing units), when it is clear to all the world this is not the case. We are told that old testing methods were not adequate—which is probably true—but it is also evident that this is asserted only to remove exclusive standards and that no alternative standards are sought. And in all this, to repeat, not a serious thought is given to education.

The students are bored—bored because they have already in high school enjoyed the freedoms young people used to look forward to in college, bored because they have been filled with the ideology which denigrates the university as a tool of the establishment and a passport to success, bored because the old, silly, but exciting snobbism has disappeared, bored because they must prepare for careers which they know to be necessary but which they despise, and, above all, bored because the university offers them no inspiration, no vision of a higher motive for life or of vast new worlds.

This is not a happy time for the university, nor one of which we university men can be very proud. Liberal arts is a decaying rump of the university with no projects

for the future. There are too many students who do not care and too many professors with too little scholarship. The next step for the latter is unionization, which will add another hypocrisy about standards while covering the real concern for job security. This unionization will be just a further step in reducing the professor to the level of the high-school teacher. Liberal arts education would today have a hard time defending its *raison d'être* before a tribunal of the wise. In one way the solution is simple. The students are starving for spiritual nourishment, and it is right under our noses, where it always was. But no one who has any power will look to it, and the special interests would oppose it with might and main. The achievement of a liberal education by a student will, for the time being at least, be a mere piece of good luck—the coincidence of the students who long for learning meeting with the teachers who know something about the simple old things. As institutions, universities now do a great injustice to human nature.

University Standards and the Decline of Humane Learning

ALLAN BLOOM

We may begin a consideration of the problem of standards in universities with the most obvious, the most quantifiable (the fact that the quantifiable is the only persuasive thing to us is a symptom of the problem) change in standards during the last twenty years, undergraduate grade inflation. Although professors may no longer be very sure about what they measure themselves against, students do know that they are measured by those A, B, C, D, and F's, or rather those A's and B's, and the grade-point average which sums up their total achievement at the end of four years. In even the best universities the inflation in grades has matched that in the economy, with the difference that in the academic economy there is no way to inflate the A; it cannot be surpassed, so that among students there are now practically only the rich and the newly rich. A's are easy to come by, B's are the consolation prize; and unusual lack of attentiveness or failure to complete assignments results in a C. An F is an achievement, preferred by some to a C because it seems the result of an act of will on the part of its recipient rather than a sign of mediocrity. D had disappeared. With 40 to 60 percent of the students receiving honors, graduation ceremonies become something of an embarrassment for universities that regard themselves and are regarded as standard-bearers, for everyone knows that this is not a result of a breakthrough in pedagogy but of a cheapening of the product.

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CONSEQUENCES OF GRADE INFLATION

But what is wrong with this, particularly since there is good reason to think that college students are working as hard as they ever did, certainly harder than they did in the late sixties? The old system of grading was after all only a convention, and we simply adapted over time to a new one. Well, in the first place, the devalued currency may still serve for domestic purposes; but external consumers, that is, the professional schools (the market to which our products are now largely seeking to appeal), no longer trust our seal of approval. The college record does not reveal real talents or achievements, certainly not true superiority. Hence they rely on letters of recommendation and standardized tests. And since letters have suffered the same kind of inflation (after all, they are written by the professors who give the grades and whose generosity is encouraged by governmental threats to confidentiality), the tests emerge triumphant, possessing at least a certain harsh objectivity. So students too begin to consider the tests as genuine measures of accomplishment, and the machines of the Educational Testing Service replace the universities as the source of evaluation and standards. The idea of a liberal education with its multiplicity in unity, the variety of learning and sensitivity that it promotes, begins to fade as its authority, never effective for more than a brief moment in any event, is supplanted. The student can hardly take the university very seriously as the source of education, rather than as a propaedeutic to vocational training, if it is not master in its own world, if what it uniquely gives is not understood to be what prepares him for the life he is going to lead. It is one thing for a student to want to be a doctor but know that a distinct university experience precedes medical training and that his admissibility to medical school will be determined by his undergraduate performance. It is quite another thing if he thinks that the university is preparing him for specialized examinations in the profession of his choice. In this latter case, the integrity and independence of this civilizing pause in life are undermined. It is somehow absurd that the four years of study and experience, which can reveal a student's virtues in a comprehensive and concrete way, are depreciated in favor of a one-shot test.

But there is much more. In spite of the meaninglessness of grades, the new dispensation has made grade-grubbers of the students. The grade-point average does count for something. The B is almost assured, thus the A becomes extremely desirable and apparently within the reach of almost anyone. So many A's are given that an A cannot be proof of real talent for or mastery of the discipline in question; it is merely useful for the larger purpose of keeping averages high. This heavy concentration on grades for their own sake is a direct consequence of the prejudice against grading of the sixties. Then it was argued that one should seek knowledge for its own sake, and ungraded or pass-fail course options were insisted on. Mindless reformism in its indifference to reality had its usual result, the exact opposite of what is intended.

Doubtless, the desire for distinction is not the same as concern for knowledge, but it is a powerful motive that can attract the young to studies they may later learn to love for themselves. If grades represent real achievement in a discipline, they act both as guardians of it and incentives for respecting it. Grades and honors are, if properly used, a means to education; disinterested love of knowledge is its proper result. The agitation against grades took this rare result of a good education to be the common possession of every beginning student. The success of that agitation suppressed both the motive for achievement and the awe for disciplines whose teachers do not respect them. But it did nothing to excise the natural love of honor from the souls of the young. This passion to be first, allied with the practical necessity for ranking students imposed by the outside world, preserved the importance of grades (which had inflated partly as a way of having grades while making them meaningless). The grade is thus both pursued and despised. Its significance in relation to the learning of a discipline has been effectively destroyed.

The consequences have been severe for the morale of students. There is now a certain self-irony, for they are aware that this sort of egalitarianism is fraudulent. Legitimate egalitarianism lets you be what you are; demagogic egalitarianism tells you that you are what you know you are not. If everyone is said to be beautiful, then the word loses its meaning without anyone's having benefited or even having been persuaded. It is ridiculous to say that half of all tailors or farmers or doctors are excellent and that practically all the rest are very good. Rather than leveling, our university egalitarianism has raised everyone into the aristocracy of the intellect. Of course, students don't believe any of this. They want real measures of their worth. They simply cease to respect the university as a place to be tested and formed for life and come to doubt the seriousness of their teachers.

And the whole cause of learning is done a grave disservice by the obvious arbitrariness of standards. Just as the college diploma no longer guarantees any definite learning, so the peaks, the honors diplomas in those universities recognized to be best, have been lowered. We face the danger that the real, uncompromising standard of truth will slip away from us while we are busy redistributing the distinction that by nature belongs to the pursuit of truth.

FACULTY RESPONSIBILITY

How did all this come to pass? The fault, of course, lies with the professors. They not only gave the grades but wanted to; and here lies the larger significance of this tale, for undergraduate grade inflation is only a symptom of a softening of the university's core. The fuzzing of the external standard applied to students is the reflection of decay in the internal standard in the professors' souls. They are no longer sure what they want to teach or even what they as scholars are doing or aiming at. But to be somewhat more precise, it is not professors in general whom I am characterizing, it is professors of humanities and social science. And, of course,

from their part of the university came the grade inflation. The natural scientists have a clearer grasp of their objects and of what constitutes distinction in their disciplines; they keep their eyes much more surely on the inner necessity of their science, are concerned primarily with its advancement and view achievements of students with that end in mind.

It does not do to say, as some do, that it was always so, that as long ago as Aristotle political science was not expected to be as exact as mathematics. His standards for judging political science were as stringent as those he applied to mathematics; they were merely of a different kind. And once degrees with high honors in philosophy or English were as rare as those in physics. No, something new happened, and it goes to the heart of the problematic relation of the life of the mind to democratic society. For this reason mere exhortation or censure will not suffice, any more than calls to republican virtue rallied the Romans when Rome had become a great empire. I mean to suggest not that our situation is as hopeless as that of the Romans, rather that we have to face a fundamental change in our spiritual situation, not just an egregious slippage in our standards.

RADICAL EGALITARIANISM AND INTELLECTUAL INTEGRITY OF THE UNIVERSITY

This weakness or softness in the humanities and social sciences clearly revealed itself in the 1960s. America went through one of its periodic fits of radical egalitarianism.¹ This is a phenomenon intrinsically connected with our regime, which is founded explicitly on philosophic principles of equality. The institutions established to incarnate that equality were intended to control the most radical egalitarian impulses, those that rebel against the inequalities necessary to preserve equality and promote human excellence. But those impulses are always with us, fueled by the presence of unjust inequalities and by doctrines of equality that do not accept the restraints thought necessary by the Founding Fathers. There is always the temptation to rebel against nature, against the natural inequalities of body and soul as well as against those derived from convention.

In the sixties this humor for the first time in our history struck out against the universities and intellectual life in general.² Previously our universities were somehow not the target of American populist passion.

1. I am limiting myself to the American experience, although the intellectual problem itself (and its underlying political source) is global, producing somewhat different effects as it is refracted in various national media.

2. An apparently moderate expression of such radicalism is John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), which argues that all inequalities, and in particular superior talents, have a right to development and expression only so long as they benefit the most disadvantaged members of society. Talent is community property, to be cultivated or not according to the will of society. This book has become a standard text on rights and is accepted across a surprisingly broad spectrum of American opinion.

and the egalitarian response to the great East-Coast universities had been to build universities in their image across the country. The best American universities maintained a relatively serious intellectual posture, partly out of love of truth, partly out of snobbism, and partly because they had as models and censors the European universities, which had, up until World War II, the very highest standards and produced many truly great scholars. When the attack on the intellectual integrity of the university came, all three elements of this structure had already been undermined, and it collapsed at the first assault.

THE MORAL CLIMATE OF THE SIXTIES

One must try to reconstruct what professors were faced with in the sixties to understand their response. Students were in the vanguard of the onslaught, and professors found it hard to resist their strongly felt, or at least strongly expressed, sentiments. For professors, too, are American and find it difficult to resist public opinion. Moreover, in a country where utility is the dominant principle and the dignity of the theoretical life is correspondingly diminished, life flourishes only to the extent that those who live it and the community at large are of the comfortable persuasion that theoretical pursuits are useful. The quiet voice of reason hesitates before outbursts of moral indignation. And the first issue that came on the scene was the one best suited to touch American conscience: race. Slavery was America's greatest injustice, and it offended our leading, perhaps our only, principle of justice, equality. No thoughtful and decent citizen could shirk the responsibility of doing his utmost to stamp out its legacy. Citizenship and scholarship make different demands on us, and we generally lack a mediating principle. The university's purpose is to understand, not to change, the world. But that is not always the view of many of those who are part of it, and in the sixties many wanted to use the university to reform society.

It was one thing to make every effort to be sure that all those who could and wanted to participate in the special higher educational community did so. It was another thing to change its character in order to accommodate those who had been left out. But the latter happened in spite of, and partly because of, the best intentions. First, admissions standards were lowered. Then came a tacit, and sometimes explicit, easing of grading standards. There followed changes in curriculum and instant discovery of new fields of study to respond to demand. Next there was a fatal agreement to use race as a criterion in the search for faculty, which meant an abandonment of the university's hard-won transcendence of race, class, nation, and religion—a transcendence based only on the universality of truth. As a consequence, segregation in housing accommodations and even in the classroom began to be tolerated. And, finally, one witnessed repeated and ill-resisted attacks on freedom of speech and freedom of thought. These were joined to an even more ominous self-doubt as to the integrity of the disciplines—weren't they after all more or less subtly racist? All this was accompanied by a surge

of Marxist thinking that interpreted the university—previously held to be the symbol and the reality of liberal democracy's devotion to the principle that the truth shall make men free—as the vehicle of “bourgeois ideology.”

On the back of the moral sentiments given currency by the civil rights movement rode the antiwar movement that, although its appeal to legitimacy as a force within the university had no ground whatsoever, increased the passions of self-righteousness to such a degree that whatever was demanded by its proponents became instantly respectable. The essence of its appeal was hostility to all authority, not merely the authority of elected officials (elections, of course, are all fraudulent) who were sending the young men to war, but also the authority of tradition and that of teachers, and, even more, the authority of talent, virtue, science, and the quest for truth. The university's organization, the distinction between professors and students, and the primacy of learning over teaching, were understood to be part of a general system of domination, as was slavery. The result of these opinions was great suspicion of the faculty, an erosion of its autonomy and central position in the university, and a further transformation of the curriculum to meet demand, a sweeping away of much of traditional learning that could not justify itself in the eyes of the students.

The last of the three great waves of moralizing that broke on the university was feminism. It took advantage of the general mood of moral certainty, profited by the analogy to slavery, and claimed a stake in the ideology of liberation from domination. Feminism did not alter the tendencies set afloat by the other waves; it only reinforced them. In particular, it broadened the attack on the traditional curriculum, in that most works of literature and philosophy can be said to be sexist and thereby discredited, whereas charges of racism can be leveled at only a few. And insistence that the university take part in the fight against sexism, particularly against conventional male and female roles, required a much more difficult and questionable effort because, while almost everyone in universities was against racial distinctions and knew in some measure what it would mean to overcome them, at least in the universities, neither of these conditions prevailed in the case of the women's movement.

The three cardinal sins of the egalitarian creed—racism, sexism, and elitism—became dogma in the university. Since the scholar's eye is very easily diverted from his elusive goal, which has so little popular appeal, the whole apparatus set up to fulfill the new goals proved very distracting. Universities acquired new bureaucrats to oversee the policies, and the old ones pledged to dedicate themselves to their efficacy. The federal government, instructed and emboldened by the example the universities were themselves setting, had no hesitation about imposing affirmative action on them. Many universities assigned to the task an administrator with the wondrous title of “compliance officer.” Now, no one who is thinking about such things can be thinking about education and scholarship. The spectacu-

lar lawsuits that hit the front pages do not tell the real story of the subtle poison that now permeates the atmosphere of the university. The special character and vocation of the university and its inner confidence are threatened. Among other things, hypocrisy runs rampant, the hypocrisy of those who insist the programs work and tamper with the facts or deceive themselves, and the hypocrisy of those who believe they don't work but who know the fatal consequences of being tagged a nonbeliever.

“ANTIELITISM” AND UNIVERSITY PURPOSE

So-called elitism is the vice most directly related to standards, because standards are what is meant by elitism. And antielitism provides the greatest challenge to the university. Antiracism and antisexism were only dangerous to the extent that they promote an egalitarianism inimical to the intellectual life. Properly understood, demands for genuine equality of blacks and women can be easily met without changing the essential character of the university. But the stupid, the tendentious, the self-seeking and the intellectually lazy cannot be so integrated. The various disciplines require talents of a sort that are hard to deny and which no teacher should fail to favor. There is a natural rank order—not necessarily always respected, but always there—that education must encourage, for the good of the community, for the good of learning, and for justice to individuals.

Elitism is nothing but a pseudoscientific term popularized by social science which makes something natural seem conventional and perverted. And, in some measure, the rhetoric of antielitism was resisted; it was resisted by the natural scientists. They passed the buck to the social scientists and the humanists, who proved more accommodating. Natural scientists too were Americans and were in general favorably disposed to the new mood. But they were also sure of what they were doing. The optimistic view that science is the necessary and sufficient condition of democracy—the ambience in which science slumbered with good conscience—was fading, partly under the influence of the radical critique; however, their objects, the way in which those objects should be studied, and what constitutes truth about them are all clear to scientists and agreed upon. The model science is mathematics. Perhaps contemporary science has purchased its authority by a narrowness that is in the long run deleterious to science itself; it has certainly done so by making itself incapable of speaking about anything human and the world of concern to us.

But for all that, the scientists cannot deceive themselves that they are teaching science when they are not. They have powerful operational measures of competence. And inwardly they believe, at least in my experience, that the only real knowledge is scientific knowledge. In the dilemma that faced them—mathematicians wanted, for example, to see more blacks and women hired but could not find nearly enough competent ones—they in effect said that the humanists and social scientists should hire them. Under-

lying this attitude was a profound contempt for the humanities and social sciences, although the natural scientist often paid lip service to them. Indeed, the sixties brought to the surface the submerged fact that the university no longer has any real unity of purpose, no community of subject matter or vision. The natural and the human sides of the university are now almost accidental traveling companions, as it were, sharing the same ship. Neither really has much need of the other. The split is papered over with clichés about culture for undergraduate consumption; but after the liberal education part of the curriculum is gotten through, the two worlds part company never again to meet.

Believing that there are no real standards on the other side, scientists assumed that adjustments there could easily be made. With profoundest irresponsibility, they went along with various aspects of affirmative action, assuming, for example, that any minority students admitted without proper qualifications would be taken care of by other departments if they did not do well in science. The scientists did not anticipate large-scale failure of such students with the really terrible consequences that would entail; they took it for granted that they would succeed somewhere else in the university.

COLLAPSE OF CONVICTION

The really crucial aspect of this whole story is that the humanists and social scientists gave in or, rather, gave cheerful assent; for I can only believe that had they anything like the conviction the scientists had as to the value and validity of their work, they would have fought and succeeded in their fight. But that conviction was lacking, and we must address ourselves to the reasons for that lack of conviction in order to diagnose our ills and prescribe for them.

In the first place, social science and the humanities deal with the human world on which the political movements of the sixties and seventies were trying to impose a new interpretation. For the activists these disciplines were, to the extent that they in any way promoted differing views, the enemy that had to be defeated. No radical group, so far as I know, thought relativity or evolution notions that had to be opposed.³ Only certain applications of natural sciences—providing arms for imperialism or technology for capitalists in their efforts to pollute the environment—were condemned, and scientists could easily disavow such uses of their work and were eager to do so.

But American historians taught that equality is the fundamental principle of this regime and that this principle, subscribed to by all the Founding Fathers, in the long run doomed slavery. These professors were by their very teachings enemies of those whose interest was to show that this regime is

3. Earlier communists, of course, did. But the movements of the sixties were less theoretical and less concerned with self-contradiction.

root and branch racist and must be supplanted by another. In order to keep in the good graces of the wave of the future, so famous a historian as Edmund Morgan had a sudden conversion and found that equality was an ideological invention of the Virginia aristocrats to deceive poor whites into allying with rich ones to keep down the slaves rather than following their true class interests, which would have dictated solidarity of poor whites and blacks.⁴ Thus history makes its autocritique and purges itself of racism. Only those who were willing to make such concessions could avoid the danger of frightful accusations and of losing their moral footing as equality moved forward.

But it is not only that the humanists and social scientists were alone in the front lines that caused their weakness. Rather, concurrently, they were experiencing an inner doubt about the reality of their disciplines. In the simplest terms, they too believe that knowledge is scientific knowledge and that to the extent they are not scientific, they have no foundations. Here the situations of the humanities and the social sciences diverge. They are united in that both must talk about human things and that *the* model of science or knowledge makes it very difficult to do so. But their responses to this difficulty differ. The social sciences try in one way or another to be scientific, to quantify the study of man and thus break away from the tainted embrace of the humanists and escape to join the naturalists in their white laboratory garb. The humanists, in contrast, seek another source of legitimacy, hoping the sciences will cede them a little piece of their empire, which they will promise not to explain away. *Imagination* and *creativity* are typical watchwords against the advance of science, but they prove increasingly empty to the extent that they cannot find a place in nature.

REACTION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

This difference accounts for the difference between the humanities and social sciences in their reactions to the demands placed on them by students and the community. The social sciences, with the partial exception of economics, had long since abandoned the attempt to give a simply mechanical account of man and society in favor of Max Weber's method that distinguishes facts from values. Social facts, like natural facts, admit of scientific treatment. Social science, it was alleged, had not previously succeeded because it mixed value judgments with factual statements. A value-free social science could attain to the same kind of objectivity as natural science. But this assertion is at the same time an admission that something specifically human escapes the purview of science. And that something is what is most important from the point of view of life. Protestantism, democracy, and science are all equally values, themselves unsupported by reason, that form and transform the facts reason apprehends.

4. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975).

Thus when students accused social scientists of studying the wrong things, of being indifferent to values and marching to the drum of those who paid them, the latter had very little to say in response. They could not criticize the students' values on rational grounds; they were actually intimidated by those values, both in their content and by the students' commitment to them. They could not seriously defend academic freedom because it is merely one value, a preference no more valid than any other preference. Hot commitment at least evidences its holder's concern for values, a claim that cool reason cannot make. In the topsy-turvy perspective introduced by the fact-value distinction, irrational intensity becomes a means, the only means, of validating preferences. The students brought this home to their teachers. There was a premium on commitment, real or feigned (and there are no objective criteria for distinguishing between the two); and the social scientists began to wonder whether their preference for liberal democracy was not just conformism as opposed to the more unconventional preferences of the students.

David Easton, in a presidential address to the American Political Science Association, gave the response.⁵ He said, in essence, that social scientists had been insensitive to value questions and that if the students, now called "post-behavioralists," would leave them be, in the future social science would be useful to their ends. He handed over the sword of sovereignty to them and surrendered the university to the only two forces that have much vitality in the contemporary world, science and public opinion. And, as scientists frequently see with anguish, public opinion is the senior partner. Science provides the power; public opinion decides how it will be used. Easton admitted that reason and hence the university have no standard with which to guide, instruct, or resist the preferences of public opinion. He called for more "engagement" on the part of the social sciences, an engagement responding to the demand for "relevance."

REACTION OF THE HUMANITIES

Professors of the humanities, in contrast, reacted with a kind of despair. They sensed themselves to be irrelevant, for what did Sophocles or Milton have to do with the urgent issues of the day? Many of them threw in their lot with the revolution almost as a form of penance for having idled in green pastures while there was suffering in the world. The humanities were in an uncomfortable position. They do not have the authority of science, and they are somehow connected with tradition, style, and form—all of which are contrary to the taste of democracy and anathema to the radical movements. The peculiar agony of their situation can be judged by the kind of arguments about proper writing style to which teachers of English have had to

5. "The New Revolution in Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (December 1969): 1051-1061.

stoop and by how many of them have joined the attack on grammar. The humanities curriculum was ravaged in the sixties. Respect for and knowledge of the classics have declined drastically.

The humanities had no response like that of Easton's to make. They could only stand idly by, watching their clientele leave and preparing to water down what they served. What happens to standards in the humanities when the old literature is not taken seriously is illustrated by an example the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives for *standard*: "We always return to the writings of the ancients as the standard of true taste." This is the polar star of the humanities as is mathematics for the natural sciences. When it does not shine, we are adrift; and the fact that it was clouded over is the cause of the easy capitulation, which in turn is the cause of its near extinction.

The humanities are the realm of deepest crisis. To begin with, nobody is quite sure what they are. The field has no rhyme or reason. If one looks at natural sciences one sees the sense of its divisions and also their interconnections. They can give an account of themselves. Although the status of the social sciences is much more problematic, something similar can be said of them. The humanistic part of the university in contrast is just a heap of departments without any discernible order or vision of a whole of which they are parts, no account of what kind of knowledge they are seeking or what they contribute to the education of the whole man. At best, with a sort of insecure snobbism, they say they stand for culture. The field looks like a pile of leftovers—the incomprehensible and humane residue—after the various sciences divided up the world. In the midst of the humanities sits the enfeebled giant philosophy, which once had the overview of the disciplines and assigned them their place in the coherent whole of human knowledge. It has become, mostly, either history of philosophy, that is, history of now refuted attempts to establish such an overview, or methods of science, the rules by which the disciplines must be played. Nobody really looks for the truth, or a significant portion of it, in the humanities. They seem to exist as the shrine of the unsatisfied longings for knowledge of the good life.

HUMANISTS AND SCIENTISTS

Illustrative of our present intellectual situation is a recent article in *The New York Times* describing the visit of a professor of music to Rockefeller University. The life scientists working there brought bag lunches and listened to the musicologist's lecture. The project was inspired by C. P. Snow's silly ideas about the two cultures, the rift between which will be healed if humanists learn the second law of thermodynamics and physicists read Shakespeare. This enterprise would, of course, be something other than an exercise in tolerance and spiritual uplift only if the physicists learned something important for his physics from Shakespeare and the humanist similarly profited from the second law of thermodynamics. The fact is that

nothing of the sort ensues, that for the scientist the humanities are recreation (often deeply respected by him, for he sees that more is needed than what he offers but is puzzled about where to find it), and that for the humanist the natural sciences are at best indifferent, at worst the alien and the hostile.

The *Times* quoted Joshua Lederberg, the president of Rockefeller University, an institution from which philosophy was recently banished, as saying after the lecture that C. P. Snow was on the right track but "counted wrong," there are not two but many cultures, one example of which is that of the Beatles. This represents the ultimate trivialization of a trivial idea that was just a rest station on a downward slope. Lederberg did not see in the humanities the human knowledge that complements the study of nature but just another expression of what is going on in the world. In the end, it is all more or less sophisticated show business. *Culture* here has exactly the same debased meaning it has in sociology when youth or drug "cultures" are spoken of. What originally had high meaning becomes eviscerated and meaningless in a sea of democratic relativism. *Sous entendu* in Lederberg's statement and almost everyone's belief is that natural science has a special status. The rest is just a matter of opinion or taste. There is no human truth for the humanities to get at.

THE BANEFUL INFLUENCE OF NIETZSCHE

This crisis in the intellectual unity of the university and the concomitant lack of communication among its members have been brewing for a very long time, and the university disturbances only sharpened them and made them more obvious. From antiquity through the eighteenth century, science was an articulated whole, each of whose parts was necessary and coherent with the rest. Man was one part of nature, and the study of man was understood to be a rational natural science. The teachings of physics and biology were not such as to make man as we know him incomprehensible. The great philosophers were equally great natural scientists and great political scientists. But toward the end of the eighteenth century, physics had emancipated itself and attained what was believed to be metaphysical neutrality. Its results contributed little or nothing to the original question of philosophy, What is the good life? Nature as it appeared in mathematical atomism was too low to act as a standard for morality.

Under the aegis of philosophy a new organization of the sciences was established that seemed to save the human phenomena. The distinction between nature and freedom, or nature and history, was established. Natural science was to study nature, and human science man. The distinction was founded on what were argued to be two dimensions of the real. The human sciences, particularly history, philology, esthetics, and morality, were to provide the rational basis for the understanding of man and the answers to the questions of greatest concern to him. Under the influence of this inspiration the great nineteenth-century scholarship flourished: it had

its purpose in the moral result that was expected of it. However, the results were not such as to justify the expectations of, for example, Kant, while the separation from nature had become permanent. The aimlessness and dispiritedness of the human sciences were powerfully diagnosed by Nietzsche among others as early as the 1870s. And he added a new element to the academic malaise by arguing powerfully that the human sciences could never be sciences, that reason about human things was but rationalization. He invented the term *value* in its modern sense and argued that values are products of the unconscious and works of art.

Nietzsche's teachings, which were profoundly antiacademic, became a powerful part of academic opinion and a major element in the lack of coherent purpose in the human studies. The impulse he gave did not establish new disciplines or revitalize the old ones. Rather, it contributed to their self-doubt and an eagerness to attach themselves to modernism in the nonacademic arts. The new social sciences invaded their domain and took away a large part of the belief that important truths were to be learned from them. They became otiose and largely antiquarian. While natural science went from success to success, the place of the humanities in the university was preserved by tradition, not by any living need for them. And their primary function came to be preservation of tradition.

DEMOCRACY AND THE VOCATION OF THE HUMANITIES

But this is just where modern regimes are most inimical to the intellectual life. As Tocqueville so brilliantly showed, men in democracies have confidence in their own judgments and above all accept no authorities. Tradition is just information. Moreover, the principle of utility dominates their lives. Natural science can be admired for its utility in the production of well-being. But the humanities cannot; and to the extent they try to justify themselves on utilitarian grounds to an audience motivated by utility, they corrupt themselves. They are of value precisely because they are reminders of something other than utility. Their highest vocation in a democracy is to present alternatives to the dominant views of man and the good life for the sake of freedom of the mind. But that vocation is most threatened and least appreciated in a democracy. When the humanists themselves doubt the value of tradition, the cause is hopeless. Only the most uncompromising awareness of and attention to the authentic seriousness of Plato or Shakespeare can keep the flame alive.

And I contend that that concern is now very weak. The latest trend (succeeding many others, all of which had as their purpose to find something useful in the classics without having to take them seriously as authorities) is criticism, particularly a new brand, a Nietzscheanism at third hand. One form of it is called deconstructionism, which is premised on the impossibility of understanding authors as they understood themselves. This means that we cannot look for objective wisdom in the writers of the past. We are, as it were, the creators of the texts. Whether intentionally or

not, this conceit most successfully of all cuts us off from the influence of the past and is the final step in democratization. The teachers of this view are the Huey Longs of the intellectual world, every man a critic.

My argument is that the humanities above all should be the source of standards for the university as a whole, as opposed to the specialized criteria provided by natural science. The dedication to the great classics of philosophy and literature generates nonarbitrary standards, and the motive of that dedication is the relevance of those classics to our situation. For we can only recognize that there is an intellectual crisis in the light of the standards they provide. They may not have the answers, but they can show us both the questions and give us guidance about how to study them. The burning issue always and especially now is the place of man in nature. Contempt of that issue is the source of the disunity in the university. The disease is above all in the humanities, and the cure lies there, too.

Philosophy and the Founding

I am delighted and honored to be the Humanities Lecturer for 1986 in Nevada, a state that is representative of so many of our nation's ancestral virtues as well as its most advanced ways of life. Last year I was in Reno, and this year I have an engagement in Las Vegas and begin, therefore, to flatter myself that I am becoming the academic equivalent of Frank Sinatra.

This is a good place from which to survey our constitutional past and future on the eve of the Bicentennial year. Some of you may be a bit surprised that I, in consultation with the Nevada Humanities Committee, have chosen a political theme for this lecture, since the humanities are now generally supposed to deal with culture, not politics, to be beyond or even higher than politics. But this is an error that impoverishes our experience of literature and makes it difficult for us to think properly about politics. It is only when this

Allan Bloom, a distinguished philosopher, political theorist, and social thinker, delivered the Ninth Annual Humanities Lecture at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, on October 10, 1986. Professor Bloom has been awarded Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Humanities (Cornell University), and Paris Exchange (University of Chicago) fellowships, as well as many other scholarly prizes and honors. He has translated, interpreted, and edited the works of Rousseau, Shakespeare, Plato, and Swift. As a scholar also interested in contemporary issues, Bloom echoes Tocqueville's reservations that "a democracy encourages a devotion to utility, risking a loss of desire for pure knowledge." In his essays on education, the university, and a democratic society he views the crisis of our time from the vantage point of both classical philosophy and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. One of his fundamental concerns is with a social-political regime's impact on the cultivation of character. His new book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, will appear early in 1987. Professor Bloom has taught at Yale, Cornell, Toronto, Tel Aviv, and Paris universities. Since 1983 he has been professor of social thought and co-director of the John M. Olin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy at the University of Chicago.

error is corrected that classic literature will become truly important for us again.

Think for a moment of Shakespeare. Can one read *Julius Caesar* seriously without powerfully experiencing what the republic meant to Caesar and to his opponents? Is Prince Hal to be understood without reflecting on the meaning of monarchy? To forget the political dimension of these works in favor of concentration on the personal psychology of the heroes or the form of the works is to denature them. Humans are political animals, and the risks and the rewards of political life are a large part of their fulfillment. And, of course, the choice between monarchy and republicanism was one that faced the founders of our nation. Similarly, they had to confront the tendency toward mob rule within republics so vividly depicted by Shakespeare in the Roman plays. They were profoundly conscious of the range of political possibilities and built a constitution intended to be the best possible solution to the political problem and to avoid the difficulties inherent in every regime. They had to be readers because all these possibilities were not present to be experienced in their time; they did not want a form of government intended to avoid difficulties that they faced in the here and now, only to fall, as a result of their solutions, into dangers that seemed distant in the present.

To found a people, one must have the fullest rational and imaginative grasp of the human situation. Similarly, Lincoln needed Macbeth to come to terms with the problem of ambition, the problem personally faced by all great statesmen. Great poetry and great philosophy are the nourishment of those who undertake the greatest political task, and they in turn were the most interesting subjects of poets and philosophers from Homer and Plato until only yesterday. Such is the deep sense of what we call the humanities; and it is the sense that we need in order to recapitulate for ourselves, as we must, the experience of the founding of our nation. We have tended not to take monarchy, for example, seriously because the success of the American experiment was so great, but such success risks turning into self-satisfaction and a dulling of the awareness that we are always threatened, that our beliefs and our convictions are the soul not only of our founding but of our continuation.

It is not only the broad sense of human nature and politics provided by the humanities that is requisite to reconstitute the Consti-

tution in our minds, but also, in particular, the reflection on the principles of politics contained in that branch of the humanities called political philosophy. Political philosophy is the quest for knowledge of the good or the best regime. The founders were exquisitely educated in the tradition of political philosophy. Contrary to popular notions, this is not a practical nation that left theoretical studies to ineffectual Europeans. It is rather the most theoretical nation ever to exist. Not basing themselves on tradition, revelation, or any authority, starting afresh in the full light of day, a group of enlightened individuals constructed a regime intended to bring into life certain self-evident, i.e., available to the reason of all people, truths arrived at by philosophic reflection. This was the first regime founded by philosophy and philosophers, meant to be an example to all and a liberation from the burden of the past. What is more, all Americans were understood to be capable of reproducing the thought of the Constitution and of choosing the government established by it on the basis of their own compelling reason. The Constitution was therefore accompanied by a manifesto of its intention, one of the greatest of all pieces of political rhetoric, the Declaration of Independence, and by a commentary on its meaning, which, if not precisely political philosophy, is informed by political philosophy—the *Federalist*. These documents were meant to be read by all Americans and to persuade them both of the truth of the underlying principles and of the goodness of the regime into which those principles had been translated. Love of truth, not reverence, was to be the prevailing disposition of an enlightened citizenry. The founders had studied the classical philosophers and historians with unrivaled care and intelligence and in particular were impressed with John Locke. Our carelessness, nay, indifference, about such things has put us in the position of no longer having good reasons for adherence to our institutions. Look at the *Federalist*, and see what ordinary citizens were supposed to understand then.

The question of political philosophy, what is the good regime, was to have been the question of every American. The very sophistication that now sees this question as naive might be a measure of the distance we have traveled from the American founders and might give us pause, wondering whether that distance does not separate us from concern for and understanding of the regime. It would behoove us in the coming Bicentennial year to concentrate

less on celebrations than on the lost art of meditation on what we believe now, what we can really believe in our age of relativism, Marxism, utilitarianism, nihilism, capitalism, communism, Freudianism, historicism, pragmatism, and existentialism—all of which are at more or less of a remove from and in tension with the inalienable natural rights of the Declaration of Independence that were incorporated in our republican form of government.

During the past two centuries successive powerful waves of thought that were generated (with the exception of pragmatism) in Europe have swept across the United States, and it is important to assess their effect on our souls. I can illustrate my meaning by reference to preconstitutional views. The signers of the Declaration of Independence told a candid world that they held certain truths to be self-evident. These truths were not values or myths; and their self-evidence was such that blood could be spilled on their authority and responsible people could revolt in their name. Implicit in their declaration was the untruth of those opinions that were used to legitimize all other regimes in the world. Regimes that did not accept equality or freedom, did not derive their authority from the consent of the governed, and did not conceive their sole function as the protection of the natural rights for the sake of which people consent to be governed were declared false, bad, and unjust by the Declaration. It was taken for granted that Americans as Americans would believe the Declaration's principles to be truly good and just. Such belief was to be the heart and soul of the regime without which the specific institutions would be lifeless bodies.

The founders correctly assumed that the old principles, although still embodied in the other existing regimes, had become unbelievable and were hence dying, if not dead, and that those regimes would have to be reformed or overthrown. Although we do not necessarily take the founders' principles seriously, we automatically accept the falseness of the ancient political claims that underlay aristocracies, monarchies, and theocracies. We tend to forget the grand moral and religious inspirations allied to those claims and, therefore, we forget the enormous overcoming that was required to do them in and the imperious need to have principles in which serious people believe in order to underpin any serious regime.

However that may be, given the character of the later challenges

to the founding principles, we may now very well be in the same situation as were the old regimes at the time of the Revolution; taking for granted what cannot be taken for granted, assuming the viability of arrangements that no longer have a foundation in conviction.

I have become even more mindful of the gravity of our problem since I originally agreed to speak on this subject. Recently I had the occasion to hear distinguished professors of law and federal judges talking about the Constitution. And I must report that it was surprising and shocking to discover how little they took it seriously, how far they were from believing they had anything to learn from the founders. These persons covered the whole range of our political spectrum, from Left to Right, and had widely differing agendas. They had in common only an indifference to the Constitution as a possible inspiration for their own understanding of what the United States is or ought to be. The most obvious source of this neglect or contempt is the progress in the United States of one of those European schools of thought, historicism. This expresses itself most simply in the view that eighteenth-century thought is too primitive to help us in twentieth-century deed. During the Kennedy administration some of its intellectuals thought it a brilliant put-down to say about someone, "He has one of the best minds of the 18th century"—implying that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., was of infinitely more use to us now than Alexander Hamilton would be. Or, as one law professor at a meeting I attended put it, "If we were forced to follow the dental practices of 1787, we would all have wooden teeth like George Washington." He believed, as most of us somehow do, that as we surpass our ancestors in knowledge of medicine, so we surpass them in knowledge of politics. Something like belief in progress underlies most of our thought. The founders, on the other hand, hoped and expected that there would be great progress in the useful sciences, but were confident that nothing would supersede the natural rights belonging to individuals and that their abandonment would certainly be the opposite of progress. They boldly asserted that the most fundamental truths about politics were known to them and would always be the same.

Historicism undermines what were thought to be the essential beliefs in a variety of ways. According to historicists, there are no permanent principles. Human nature itself is not permanent, so what is most important changes from generation to generation. It denies the very possibility of foundations. Regimes grow and are not

the result of conscious political choices and decisions made by statesmen. Therefore, these institutions are not particularly meaningful, and the founders were not really responsible. The state of nature and natural rights are myths appropriate to that particular period but are no longer true or useful. The founders were slaveholders and were rich, and therefore the limited or restrained democracy, or the republic, they instituted was a reflection of their racist and elitist ideology. When one looks at things in this way, there is no incentive to see whether the arguments made in the *Federalist* about the risks run by democracy and the need for restraints for the sake of democracy are still important for us, for we are already sure that they are not. There is surely no reason to respect the Constitution.

More surprising to me than the views just cited, which are more common on the Left, are the views I hear enunciated by conservatives, some of them appointed to the highest courts by Ronald Reagan. They, too, are historicists and tend to identify what is most important about the United States with the free market, or capitalism, and to regard the advanced science of economics as the best guide for political and legal judgment. Actually, although they think of themselves as very up-to-date, their ancestry is in another eighteenth-century school of thought, utilitarianism, and in its founder, Jeremy Bentham. That school arose at about the same time as the founding, but understood itself to be more modern. It stemmed, as did constitutional thought, from the philosophy of John Locke and agreed with the founders that civil society exists to protect the property of its members. But the utilitarians simplified Locke's teaching in a variety of ways, making the increase of property the sole goal of civil society. They abandoned the state of nature and natural rights as, to use Bentham's phrase, "nonsense on stilts." Society exists for "the greatest good of the greatest number," not to protect individual rights. Locke argued that the rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of prosperity" are, properly understood, both just and useful to society as a whole. Utilitarianism, as its very name indicates, thought only the useful important and treated the just as metaphysical hash, to the extent it differed from the useful. "Maximization" and "efficiency" are the words one typically hears from utilitarians. The private, selfish calculations of individuals in the market constitute the system of human relations that allows humans to associate peaceably and to increase their

well-being. This system is understood to work almost automatically, and the greatest threat to it would appear to be government and its intervention in the network of free exchange.

The Constitution must then be judged according to its effect on the efficient operation of the market, and much of it becomes questionable in that light—for example, federalism and the separation of powers can be very cumbersome. A free-marketeer tends to limit and restrain government as much as possible without asking whether the founders had other civic intentions in addition to the encouragement of market activity. Slavery would be judged bad because it is economically inefficient, not because it violates the natural right to liberty. Politics serves economics, not economics politics. Coolidge's famous formula, "The business of America is business," encapsulates the economic view. The nation is not something good in itself, and the market—which is most efficient when largest and thus tends to go beyond the nation—is a more profound phenomenon than the nation. Considerations of civic virtue are beyond the ken of such an economic understanding of politics. Milton Friedman found no difficulty in recommending a wholly professional army, where the motive for service is pay, not patriotism.

Here the founders had the deeper view, and investigation into their views would help us to avoid dangerous political mistakes and to criticize plausible simplifications. They understood Locke.

And Locke, of course, himself was still much more of a political scientist than an economist, for the market, the peaceful competition for the acquisition of goods, requires the prior existence of the social contract, the agreement to abide by contracts and the establishment of a judge to arbitrate and enforce contracts, without which we are in a state of war. The market presupposes the existence of law and the absence of war. War was the condition of humanity prior to the existence of civil society, and the return to war is always possible. The force and fraud required to end war have nothing to do with the market and are illegitimate within it. The rational behavior of people at peace, in which economics specializes, is not the same as the rational behavior of people at war, as was so tellingly pointed out by Machiavelli.

Political science is more comprehensive than economics because it studies both peace and war and their relations. The market cannot be the sole concern of the polity, for the market depends on the

Locke

polity, and the establishment and preservation of the polity continuously requires reasonings and deeds that are uneconomic or inefficient. Political action must have primacy over economic action, no matter what the effect on the market. This is why economists have had so little reliable to say about foreign policy, for nations are in the primitive state of war with each other that individuals were in prior to the social contract; that is, they have no commonly recognized judge to whom they can turn to settle their disputes.

The policy advice of some economists during the Vietnam War led to an attempt to set up a kind of market between the United States and North Vietnam, with the United States making the cost of South Vietnam prohibitive to North Vietnam. But the North Vietnamese refused to play. Political science must always contemplate war with its altogether different risks, horrors, thrills, and gravity. Churchill formulated the difference between a political perspective and a market perspective in commenting on Coolidge's refusal to forgive the British war debts in the twenties (which contributed, according to Churchill, to the destabilization of Germany, with the consequences about which we all know). Coolidge said, "They hired the money, didn't they?"; to which Churchill responded, "This is true, but not exhaustive." Political science must be exhaustive, and this makes it a sticky subject for those who want to reform it so as to accord with the abstract projects of science. Consciously or unconsciously, economics deals only with the bourgeois, the person motivated by fear of violent death. The warlike human is not within its ken. Political science remains the only social science discipline that looks war in the face, and it was the founders' science.

Older generations of thoughtful Americans were aware of the constant obligation to rethink and how much depended on such rethinking. I was always struck, for example, by the difference between Frank Knight, one of the great teachers at Chicago in my day, the founder of the famous Chicago School of Economics, and his younger colleagues in economics. Knight was God-obsessed; that is, he was an atheist who talked about the religious question ceaselessly and attended every lecture about it on campus and always had something strong to say to the lecturer. He was a kind of mid-American Voltaire. And this was not just a personal tic of a free-market economist. It was for him, I believe, a necessity of his trade. He knew if Christianity were simply true, the free market and its

motives would not only be sinful but would collapse and should probably be forbidden. The world had to be demystified before the hope of salvation could be replaced by the sober quest for physical well-being as the central concern of human lives. He knew that Christianity was a serious alternative and a serious opponent, not just another preference. Utility still had its older sense for him—consisting in those goods that contribute to preservation of the body and to its avoidance of pain and pursuit of pleasure, as opposed to imaginary goods like the avoidance of Hell and the pursuit of Heaven, the really useful as opposed to the superhuman felicities known only by hearsay. Knight was aware that the understanding of the world presented by Locke and, in large measure, continued by Smith had conquered in the world; but he knew that it was always threatened, and threatened by ideas. Most people do not have coherence in their thought, just as their deeds frequently do not match their speeches, but in the long run people, and especially societies, pay the price for their inconsistencies. There are indeed those who are Marxists and democrats, but finally the two must conflict, for self-government is a contradiction in terms for one who claims all government is exploitation of the governed.

Almost all of the later movements of thought are more or less explicitly criticisms of the thought that grounded the Constitution, and their peculiar force for us is that they begin by accepting the natural equality of humans and the other leading principles of the Constitution-makers; they are not throwbacks, not a return to the old principles seemingly discredited by history, but even more up-to-date renditions of the peculiarly modern insight. This is largely true even for conservatism in its various forms. And, in my study of political philosophy, I have discovered that the source for all of those schools is one thinker of overwhelming power who is not in high repute in the Anglo-Saxon world and who is almost exclusively, although erroneously, identified with the Left: Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Rousseau had completed his work just prior to the American Revolution, but he anticipated that there would be an age of revolutions in which the new philosophy would be put into practice, and he made his objections to it in advance. It was Locke, the genius of the founders, a man he much admired, who Rousseau took to be the fullest expression of modern politics and whose political solutions he criticized while radicalizing them. Rousseau's powerful

rhetoric was responsible for much of the extremism that differentiated the French Revolution from the American Revolution. And even more he affected the intellectual climate of Europe in its judgment of America and its aspirations for its own future in ways that still endure. When one looks at the Constitution and the *Federalist*, on the one hand, and the *Social Contract*, on the other, the latter could seem to be a response to the former. Where the one encourages a large territory and a large population, the other praises a small territory and a small population, giving rise to longings for roots or community. Where the one institutes representation, the other insists on public assemblies of all the citizens, giving rise to longings for participatory democracy. Whereas the one is silent about religion (and the First Amendment provides freedom of religion as well as separation of Church and State), the other founds a new civil religion and promotes hostility to Christianity as contrary to freedom and to attachment to the community.

The Preamble begins, "We the people . . ." unproblematically. For Rousseau the transition from the band of individuals to a people with a common sentiment and a common good was the most difficult task of the political art, a creation, the model for which was Moses turning a collection of runaway slaves into the conquering Jewish people by the discipline of forty years in the desert and the imposition of the Law. And for Rousseau the most important kind of legislation was moral, whereas the Constitution and the *Federalist* are silent about it. Separation of powers, while impeding direct rule, attempts to substitute political institutions for the good character of people, thus discouraging the development of good character.

Rousseau characterized modern politics in the following way: "Ancient political thinkers incessantly talked about morals and virtue, those of our time talk only of commerce and money." Aristotle taught that the purpose of the legislator is to make humans good and doers of noble deeds. Locke said that people institute governments for themselves in order to protect their property. Locke taught that humans were first in a state of nature with concerns only for self-preservation. This means in effect that an individual seeks property for the sake of that self-preservation. What moves a person to give up natural independence is the threat from others to the possession and use of that person's property. Thus, the scope of government is narrowed and its functions simplified. Locke laid the groundwork, if not for an independent science of economics, at

least for one that could count on the liberation of human acquisitive impulses. For the ancients, economics was subpolitical and strictly subordinate to politics. In Locke, for the first time, it comes to the center of the political stage, although, as I have said, it is still subordinate to political science.

Rousseau's criticism does not in any sense mean that he disagreed fundamentally with Locke about natural freedom, equality, and concern with self-preservation. Rousseau did not long for the ancient city in which virtue was the end. What he claimed was that the so-called economic motives do not suffice for the establishment of a decent civil society or one that adequately protects natural freedom and equality. Virtue must again become central to political science, not, however, as the end of politics but as a means to civil freedom. Locke tried to ensure an almost automatic transition from the natural to the civil state, but Rousseau argued that natural inclinations do not suffice to make citizens out of individuals. Whether or not the state of nature is believed in anymore, all political thought after Locke has taken humans to be naturally uncivil, and it has more or less assumed what Locke taught by the means of the state of nature—this is true of Smith, Bentham, Kant, Tocqueville, Hegel, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, and Freud. And practically all of them felt constrained to address the problems raised by Rousseau concerning the sociality of humans in Locke's scheme.

Rousseau formulated the problem in this way:

Natural man is entirely for himself. He is numerical unity, the absolute whole which is relative only to itself or its kind. Civil man is only a fractional unity dependent on the denominator; his value is determined by his relation to the whole, which is the social body. Good social institutions are those that best know how to denature man, to take his absolute existence from him in order to give him a relative one and transport the I into the common unity, with the result that each individual believes himself no longer one but a part of the unity and no longer feels except with the whole. . . .

He who in the civil order wants to preserve the primacy of the sentiments of nature does not know what he wants. Always in contradiction with himself, always floating between his inclinations and his duties, he will never be either man or citizen. He will be good neither for himself nor for others. He

will be one of these men of our days: a Frenchman, an Englishman, a bourgeois. He will be nothing.

Rousseau here invented the description of modern humanity that has dominated the discussions of modern politics, society, and psychology. Modern politics has brought forth a new kind of person, the bourgeois, who, in Hegel's description, which I just mentioned, is one "motivated by fear of violent death." My own summary of Rousseau's description is that such people, when dealing with others, think only of themselves and, on the other hand, in their understanding of themselves, think only of others. Witness to the power of Rousseau's description is that his language became the language used by both sides in the quarrel between liberal democracy and its critics, Right and Left. The very term has at least a vaguely negative connotation, and for the opponents of the bourgeois he has been an obsessional theme for more than two hundred years now and shows little sign of abating. Modern politics posed the danger, according to Rousseau, of a fatal diminishing of humanity and the reduction of higher motives to lower ones.

Let us try to understand this a bit better. Locke, in looking at humanity's natural state, argued that those who work hard and efficiently could provide wealth for themselves, and he labeled such people the rational and the industrious. They are peaceable; they can take care of themselves and by their labors increase the store of goods for all. There is another kind of person, who does not work or who does not work well, and this person is needy and a threat to the property of the others. Locke dubbed them the idle and the quarrelsome. Locke divided people into two kinds without reference to their concern for others. Both kinds are selfish and self-regarding, but the former are the sources of plenty and peace and the latter the sources of scarcity and war. It follows immediately that civil society was instituted to protect the former and defend against the latter. Although the purpose of civil society is to preserve and encourage natural freedom, the means of doing so are largely economic, and a truly constituted civil society is one that emancipates and protects the human love of gain. Rousseau's enormous success was to turn the respectable, rational, and industrious into the bourgeois, and the idle and the quarrelsome into the poor, needy, disadvantaged, or underprivileged—the same persons, but the evaluation of them turned upside down.

Put more simply, Rousseau's argument against Locke is that the selfishness of the isolated individual is innocent and harmless but becomes noxious and corrupting when such an individual becomes essentially related to others or dependent on them. Such a person uses them as means to ends, that is, exploits them and can, with the establishment of money, envision infinite gain without the limit of natural usefulness. The motives for relations with others are only mercenary. The effects of becoming social are mutual exploitation and a pettiness and mean-spiritedness within the individual. Rousseau's characteristic effect on succeeding thought can be found, on the one hand, in attempts to find more radical political solutions than those proposed by Locke (e.g., Marx), and, on the other hand, the literary and psychological attempts to found an improved human type in contrast to the bourgeois—e.g., romanticism, Nietzsche, and Freud. And everywhere one finds the addition made by Rousseau to the understanding of human nature—compassion. It tempers the harshness of the purely economic motives. So avid a proponent of the American regime as Tocqueville found himself compelled to invoke compassion as the corrective to democratic materialism. All of these philosophers were reacting directly to this confrontation between Locke and Rousseau.

The breadth and depth of the effects of this confrontation between the giants of modern political thought are far beyond the scope of anything I can even touch on in this short presentation, but I should like to conclude with a few remarks about the question of private property. Locke very simply taught that what a person has worked for belongs to that person. Possession of that property is both just and useful. It is just because a person clearly has possession of his own body; that body requires food, clothing, and shelter; and the food, clothing, and shelter acquired by the use of that body, he argued, clearly belong to that person as an extension of that body. It is useful because it enriches society as a whole and guarantees peace. The social contract is made by free and equal owners of property justly acquired and therefore is just. In passing, it should be repeated that utilitarianism, in casting off all this nonsense about the state of nature and natural rights, maintained only an argument for the usefulness or the utility of the protection of private property, abandoning argument for the justice of the system. This was the step that established the full-blown doctrine of capitalism and with it the fully independent science of economics.

Rousseau accepted Locke's view that the right of property is established by work, but he put several question marks after it that have since dogged both theory and practice. Once all the land is taken and cultivated, those who did not get any are without resource. They are not necessarily either idle or quarrelsome, and now, at very best, they are dependent on the rich for their livelihood. Natural freedom and equality disappear. Given the primary right to life, there is a conflict between the rights of property owners and the needy in their just and natural claim. If the needy do not get some satisfaction, then there is simply a conflict between two kinds of natural right. Locke pictured the social contract as the agreement of the property owners who are permitted by it to protect their property. Rousseau pictured it as a fraud perpetrated by the rich to get the poor to accept the legitimacy of the property of the rich. The rich have more power in civil society, and therefore they will always tend to corrupt the law in their own favor.

One side of Rousseau's critique was the one picked up by Marx—that the rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer. But this was not the whole of Rousseau's critique. He further argued that a society that rewards business acumen or avarice rather than the moral virtues—compassion, goodness, patriotism, and family—is distorted. Moreover, he argued that the institutional expressions for the reward of unequal talents that were not worked for by their possessors is unjust. Because one person is born clever and strong and is able to produce much more than a person less well endowed produces with the same effort, does that make it just that the former should get greater rewards? If we are rewarding work, then the work is equal inasmuch as the more talented person did not work for his talents. Is our sense of natural justice not offended by rewarding the great good luck of one and punishing the misfortune of another?

These are real difficulties. Because of the thinner, or almost non-existent, discussion of justice by the utilitarians, the thinkers impressed by such moral considerations preempted the field of discussion. In a strange peripeteia, by the middle of the nineteenth century the Rousseauian pathos had crept into the heart of utilitarian or capitalist thought itself. John Stuart Mill, the author of one of the principal works of modern economics, repeatedly stated that the capitalist system encouraged low motives, and he looked forward to the time when equal distribution according to need and

moral worth could become the principle of political, social, and economic life. He recognized the at least temporary necessity and success of capitalism, but he did not think it good or just. Mill had to look to such post-Rousseauian notions as "spontaneity" when describing the healthy individual in *On Liberty*. He had a crisis and, in the apparently impervious Anglo-Saxon citadel of England, corrupt continental, i.e., Rousseauian, notions came to him by such improbable intermediaries as Wordsworth. It is amazing to note that from then on almost all free-enterprise economists have held equality of distribution to be just, although inefficient. This is true of the aforementioned Frank Knight as well as others. He thought about God and the market, but not much about the regime. Free-enterprise economists are not only merely neglectful of arguments for the justice of their system, but have also regarded it as positively unjust. They found their moral grounds only in capitalism's alleged protection of individual freedom.

It seems to me to be a genuine crisis when a system requires a permanent heedlessness of discussion about justice and a dulling of the sense of justice. Our educated and thoughtful classes are somewhat in the position of the many French aristocrats whose intellects and hearts could no longer subscribe to the justice of the regime that made them what they were. They were among the most avid consumers of the thought that destroyed them. When conservatives attack the "elites" who do not support capitalism, they perhaps do not give sufficient credit to the real conviction that might motivate them or have enough of a place in their thought for a disinterested love of justice. Greater self-awareness might make them look to their own inadequate articulation of the justice of the American regime and the relation of the free market to it. It is my suggestion that the founders of that regime may very well have understood these issues better than we do, and that serious reflection on how they would have responded about the justice of the American regime would be most beneficial for us because, as I have said, inner convictions about its justice are the soul of a regime.

1

Introduction

Allan Bloom

Almost a decade ago, Robert Goldwin and Walter Berns persuaded a group of us to discuss the proper way to celebrate the approaching bicentennial of the Constitution of the United States. We were, perhaps, not a typical group, but all of us agreed that the only way for us was to *think* about the Constitution.

Aside from the fact that this should be the response of serious men and women to serious things, the Constitution, of all public documents, invites rational discourse. It was written by a group of wise statesmen who believed in the necessity, goodness, and power of reason in the establishment of just regimes. Their task was to establish the framework within which the natural rights announced in the Declaration of Independence would be protected. Moreover, in the debates of the Constitutional Convention and in *The Federalist*, they gave their detailed reasons for their doings. Their authority was founded not on tradition or revelation but on nature grasped by reason. This was a new beginning, a liberation from prejudice, legitimized by reference to principles of justice assented to by man's most distinctive and most common faculty and persuasive to a candid world. The Framers were not prophets, poets, or heroes in the old sense but were, rather, reasonable men. Other men were not required to believe what they heard from the Framers but had merely to look at what they pointed to and judge for themselves. Convinced that they had the best of any discussion about the good regime, the Framers, as it were, challenged the world to meet them on the field of reason. To test their conviction is to honor them.

This is the peculiarly American form of patriotism. With us it is not, at least not essentially, the instinctive and unquestioning love of our own—the burning passion that consumes all doubts, that sacrifices reason to dedication to the community. The genius of this country—which cannot and does not wish to treat its citizens like plants rooted in its soil—has consisted in a citizenship that permits reflection on one's own interest and a calm recognition that it is satisfied by this

regime. And this reflection does not end in mere mean-spirited calculation, as is often alleged by critics from the Right and the Left, but leads to the peaks of philosophy. Our regime is founded on arguments, not commands. Obedience to its fundamental law is not against reason, and it can claim to have resolved what was thought to be the unresolvable tension between good citizenship and philosophizing.

In sum, in America, thoughtful citizenship is good citizenship. All of us involved in this project know ourselves to be modern men and women, which means that our education did not at first lead us toward the Constitution and the philosophic position underlying it. When we were young, we were taught, and were attracted by, thought that was in the air. Marx, Freud, Weber, and Nietzsche were "where it was at." And historicism was already effective enough to make us think that earlier thought could not be truer than later thought, that eighteenth-century opinions could not help us to answer twentieth-century questions. Like most people in this case, we remained attached to liberal democracy and the institutional structure given to it by the Constitution without asking whether a Marxist, an existentialist, or, for that matter, a utilitarian can do so consistently. Can any "state" be anything other than an instrument of class domination? Can irrational man also be the democratic voter? Is contempt for natural rights consistent with democratic justice?

These are obvious and necessary questions, but they arise only to those who seek for comprehensiveness and coherence, as did the Framers. That the Framers were such men is something most of us learned later, as graduate students, when we came to see that they had reasoned arguments that are defensible, if not true a priori. It required a certain de-ideologization to meet them fresh and listen to them without condescending from the heights of the twentieth century. The Framers had a keen sense of the relation between theory and practice; and their political founding was grounded in teachings about nature and the relation of justice to it. Their Bacon, Locke, and Montesquieu are worthy interlocutors—on the level of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, who inspired less impressive political achievements. The Framers held that the rational conviction of the truth of the principle of natural right was essential for fighting the American Revolution, for establishing a constitution, and for preserving it. That conviction is undoubtedly not what it once was.

Does it deserve to be? That is our question. Since the framing of the Constitution many waves of thought have washed over our intellectual shores, most of them serious, each claiming to be a progress over earlier thought. This book's table of contents provides a survey of

most of the notable ones. Some of them might have been predicted by the Framers; others would probably have surprised them. Some were directly critical of the solution to the political problem provided by the Constitution of the United States; others were not thinking of it, although their views of human nature and politics implicitly made them its critics and opponents. All have been seductive, and all have provided lenses through which Americans look at the world and by means of which they articulate its phenomena.

The authors of this book each proposed to take one of these schools of thought that had particularly interested him or her, to try to make precise what its view of constitutional politics is, and to reflect on whether the Framers' thought can make a convincing response to it. This effort was intended to be an exercise in our own self-awareness, but one that is in conformity with America's most fundamental tradition. We wished, without prejudice, to see what can still rationally be believed of the thought of the Constitution. This means that that thought had to be presented by those of us who knew it best, and then the various schools addressed by the rest. How well the thought of the Constitution would do in this contest was not presupposed. I suppose the results have been different for different ones of us. But the Constitution has been deepened and freshened for us all in seeing how it meets theoretical challenges unknown to its Framers.

When we first planned this volume, we were keenly aware that the discussion of the really interesting issues concerning our founding documents—whether popular government is a desirable form of government, whether the Constitution gives sufficient power to the people, whether religion is given a sufficient place to ensure a moral citizenry, and others—had been subordinated to secondary concerns such as the economic interests or the psychological peculiarities of the Framers, their historical situation and its intellectual limits, or their inability to distinguish value judgments from fact judgments. In other words, a new discipline, intellectual history, with newer methods—themselves related more or less consciously to new philosophies—gives priority to new kinds of questions, which prove to be endless. Thus the questions, and the answers, of the Framers—or those of any writer—can never be addressed and begin to be irrelevant, for they are alleged to have been unaware of the real questions. Their texts are thus not paths to be followed but symptoms to be diagnosed. Their arguments are judged to be untrue before being put to the test, as scholars devote themselves to explaining why they were wrong. It was precisely in response to this contempt for the text that we planned this volume. We hoped to demonstrate in deed that there is greater intellectual excitement, as well as greater political respon-

sibility in adopting the perspective of the Framers rather than that of the trends of contemporary scholarship.

But the course of events intellectual and political since our first meeting has made efforts such as this all the more urgent. A new school of thought, derivative from the others, has overwhelmed the humanities during this decade and is making considerable inroads in the social sciences and the law. This approach has appeared to be just the thing for today's radicalism in America, which, in adopting it, has given it a life unwarranted by its intrinsic merits. Its thesis is that writers determine "values" or "world views," that they are unconsciously motivated by "the will to power," and that they are the sources of the domination of men by men. There are no theoretical human beings, and there is no objectivity, only commitment and subjectivity. Writers' apparently rational interpretations of a truly meaningless world provide the foundation for systems of domination and prevent the full flowering of individuals. Writers found legitimacy, and they spawn a race of interpreters or priests who are themselves legitimized by the sacred text they interpret. The focus on texts as the essential cause of political facts reverses the old Marxist relation between infrastructure and superstructure. Writers are conceived of as autonomous and given a new weight in the understanding of things. Of course, their autonomy rests not on their reason but on their irrational, creative unconscious. A new kind of liberating interpreter is conceived to do battle with the priestly interpreter and to destroy his foundation. The priest disappears with the Bible. The new interpreter "deconstructs" the sacred text, showing that its author could not know his own motives, that his text is incoherent and explodes, when pressured by the critic into the chaotic elements lying beneath its smooth rationalized surface. Race, gender, and class are the favorite prejudices of the unconscious' ruse in its quest for power.

Texts are the enemies, according to this school, and there is no need to insist on its threat to a political tradition that rests on fundamental texts. It was the pride of the Framers that for the first time in history a nation was founded on written documents that all can read and study and that appeal to the reason of each. It is a grave undertaking to undermine the credibility of such a legacy, although the deconstructionists approach it with levity. In a perverse way the deconstructionists agree with the Framers about the importance of their writing, but they insist that the Framers wrote to impose their rich, white, male, logocentric (or Eurocentric) selves on the poor, the females, and the nonwhites of the world. One can see why the deconstructionists appeal to certain kinds of extremists. They deny each of the premises of the Framers, especially those concerning

nature, reason, and concern for the common good. Their influence now extends well beyond the academy into real politics. Deconstructionism has colored the public discussions about "original intent" as the guide for judges' interpretation of the Constitution and influenced the terms of the controversy surrounding Robert Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court. Deconstructionism must be studied, but the texts must be studied first to avoid beginning from parodies of them, parodies that are easy prey for the critics. In their digging, deconstructionists may well discover what they themselves have buried. This is easy to do when objectivity no longer prompts second thoughts.

This is how the American intellectual scene looks. Much greater events occurring outside the United States, however, demonstrate the urgency of our task. Those events are epitomized by the Statue of Liberty erected by the Chinese students in Tiananmen Square. Apparently, after some discussion whether it should be altered to have Chinese features, there was a consensus that it did not make any difference.

I write this at the moment when the terror in China has begun, and we cannot yet know what will become of those courageous young persons. But we do know the justice of their cause, and, although there is no assurance that it will ultimately triumph, their oppressors have won the universal execration of mankind. With Marxist ideology a wretched shambles everywhere, nobody believes any longer in Communist legitimacy. Everywhere, in the Communist world what is wanted is rational liberal democracy that recognizes men's natural freedom and equality and the rights dependent on them. The people of that world need and want education in democracy, which means study of the philosophy that explains the grounds of democracy and of the constitutions that actualize it. That education is one of the greatest services the democracies can offer to the people who live under Communist tyrannies and long for liberty. The example of the United States is what has impressed them most, and their rulers have been unable to stem the infection. Our example, though, requires explanations, the kind the Founders gave to the world. And this is where we are failing: dominant schools in American universities can tell the Chinese students only that they should avoid Eurocentrism, that rationalism has failed, that they should study non-Western cultures, and that bourgeois liberalism is the most despicable of regimes. However, this is not what they need. They have Deng Xiaoping to deconstruct their Statue of Liberty. We owe them something much better.

All of the contributors to this book are, with the exception of

democratic
nihilism

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Hamburger, students of, or students of students of, Leo Strauss. This great man reinterested us in America by teaching us how to read our country's political texts and demonstrating how wise they are. Suddenly we discovered how much there is at home to attract our best intellectual efforts. This was at a time when almost all of what appeared philosophically attractive engendered contempt for the Framers or what they stood for. From Strauss we learned that high adventure awaits those who wished to confront the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and *The Federalist*. His example made us ashamed of our smug sense of superiority to them.

Strauss was a refugee from Germany; hence, it was not choice that brought him to the United States. His life had been, and remained, dedicated to the question, What is reason? His was an unceasing quest for clarity about ancient and modern rationalism and the various kinds of antirationalism or irrationalism. One result of this quest was his rediscovery of the Socratic sense of political philosophy as the beginning point for the understanding of the place or fate of reason in human life. Thus, when he came to America, he discovered that it was most congenial to him. The American regime was friendly to him as Jew and philosopher, and, of course, the protections of these two aspects of his being were related in the rational universality of liberal principles. He had had experience, both theoretical and practical, of the German critique of those principles, and he unhesitatingly, unlike many refugees, preferred not the mystifying old cultures, however splendid, but a regime that in its founding faced the issues of reason and revelation. Our origins, properly understood, are more fundamental than theirs. Strauss began his study of the American regime from its highest claims for itself and, cutting through the overgrowth, went unerringly to the Founding thought that informed American reality. And he studied Lincoln as the authoritative interpreter of the liberal regime in its inevitable crisis over slavery. The United States, perhaps alone among regimes, merited philosophic examination because of its self-conscious attempt to solve the political problem, particularly in its relation to the two crucial elements—religion and philosophy—and because its founding documents were philosophic and derived from the great philosophers. He left this legacy to his students and gave us much to do.